ADAM LINK FACES A REVOLT by EANDO BINDER

244 PAGES

AMAZING STORIES

MAY 25c

The LOST RACE COMES BACK

By DON WILCOX

GIANT 15TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

18 Complete Stories & Features

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"I got them whisk-broom blues . . ."

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The young Englishman was amazed as he looked around the temple where he was believed to have lived and died. It seemed uncannily familiar, he appeared to know every nook and corner of it, yet—at least in this lifetime—he had never been there before. And mysterious was the set of circumstances that had brought him. Could it be a case of reincarnation, that strange belief of the East that souls return to earth again and again, living many lifetimes?

Because of their belief that he had formerly been a lama in the temple, the lamas welcomed the young man with open arms and taught him rare mysteries and long-hidden practices, closely guarded for three thousand years by the sages, which have enabled many to perform amazing feats. He says that the system often leads to almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind, can be used to achieve brilliant business and professional success as well as great happiness. The young man himself later became a noted explorer and geographer, a successful publisher of maps and atlases of the Far East, used throughout the world.

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1941

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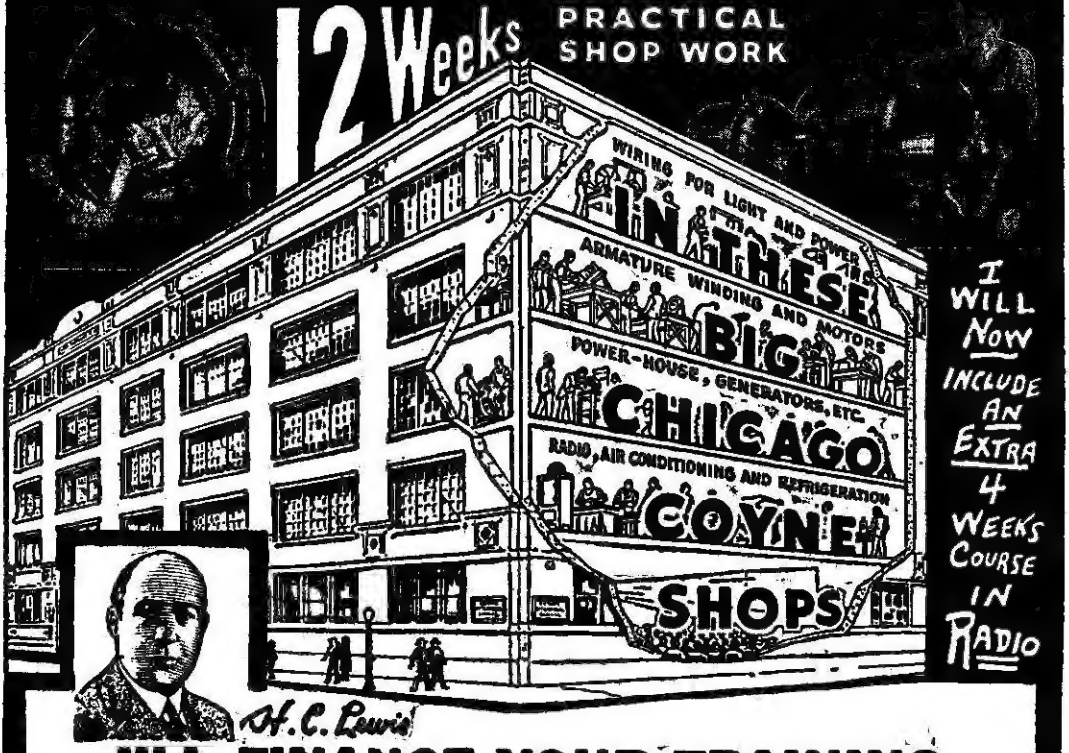

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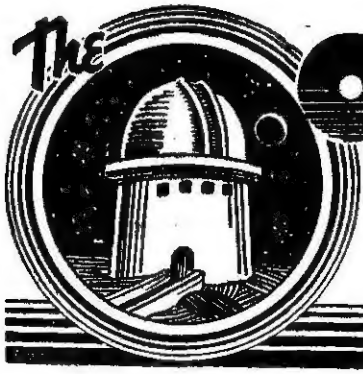

The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

FIFTEEN years ago, this month, a man named Hugo Gernsback got an idea. He didn't know how big his idea was, then, but he *knew* it was good. In fact, he was so sure it was good that he put something into it that demands a lot of faith—he put a lot of money into it.

He gambled on the idea that the reading public would like a *new* kind of magazine, a *new* kind of story. Of course, he had some basis on which to found his hopes, because he had seen Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, Garrett P. Serviss, H. Rider Haggard, and others pioneering in a new field, winning acclaim with "off-trail" fiction. So, when he put out a new magazine called AMAZING STORIES, he wasn't as crazy as a lot of people thought—and said—he was.

YOUR editor was just one of the thousands who read that first brave issue, and immediately said he *was* right. Your editor knows *now* that he was more than right—he was a veritable prophet of prophets, the poineer of a whole new branch of modern literature. That he had started something that wouldn't stop, until full grown.

So, in respect for a very good idea, we might dedicate this giant anniversary issue of AMAZING STORIES to Hugo Gernsback, the father of science fiction!

THIS issue marks the fifteenth birthday of AMAZING STORIES, the pioneer science fiction magazine. It marks the climax of fifteen long years of constant conquests in a new field, of the welding of the friendship of many hundreds of thousands of readers, of the creation of an outlet and medium of expression for a new kind of creative art—imaginative fiction based on science. But best of all it marks success, and a major milestone of accomplishment.

HOWEVER, it is not the intention of the editors of AMAZING STORIES to "point with pride." We have another, better, intention in giving our readers a special issue. It's a sort of "roll out the barrel" celebration. And to that end, here's a swell, new, big, extra special treat in the form of more stories, more articles, more features, and *more* entertainment than we've ever presented before! Here it is, readers. Read it, and enjoy it, and we hope you like it!

"It's a machine to cause wholesale amnesia among the enemy, but he's forgotten how to finish it."

WHEN we stop to look at the lead story in this issue, "The Lost Race Comes Back", we are tempted to call it "The Forty Days of Don Wilcox" because that's exactly what it took him to write the story.

But, says Don, it is a story that I'm not ashamed of. Nor are your editors ashamed of it. We think this one will remain in your memory for a long time as a story that contained more real value than anything we've presented in many a day.

To your editor's mind it is one of the finest time-travel stories written in recent years. And it has been our experience through fifteen years that the most popular type of science fiction, the type that never loses interest, is the time-travel yarn.

You'll find a new, fresh idea in this one, and an unusual significance.

(Continued on page 131)

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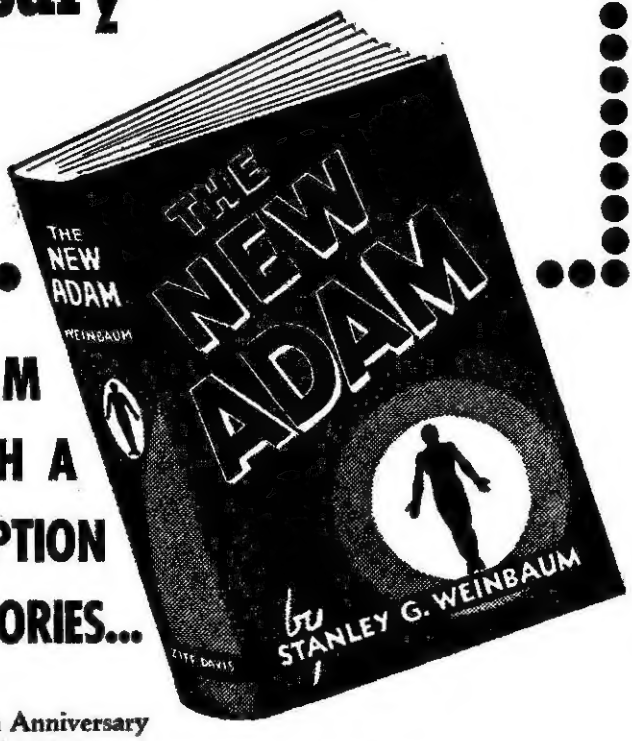

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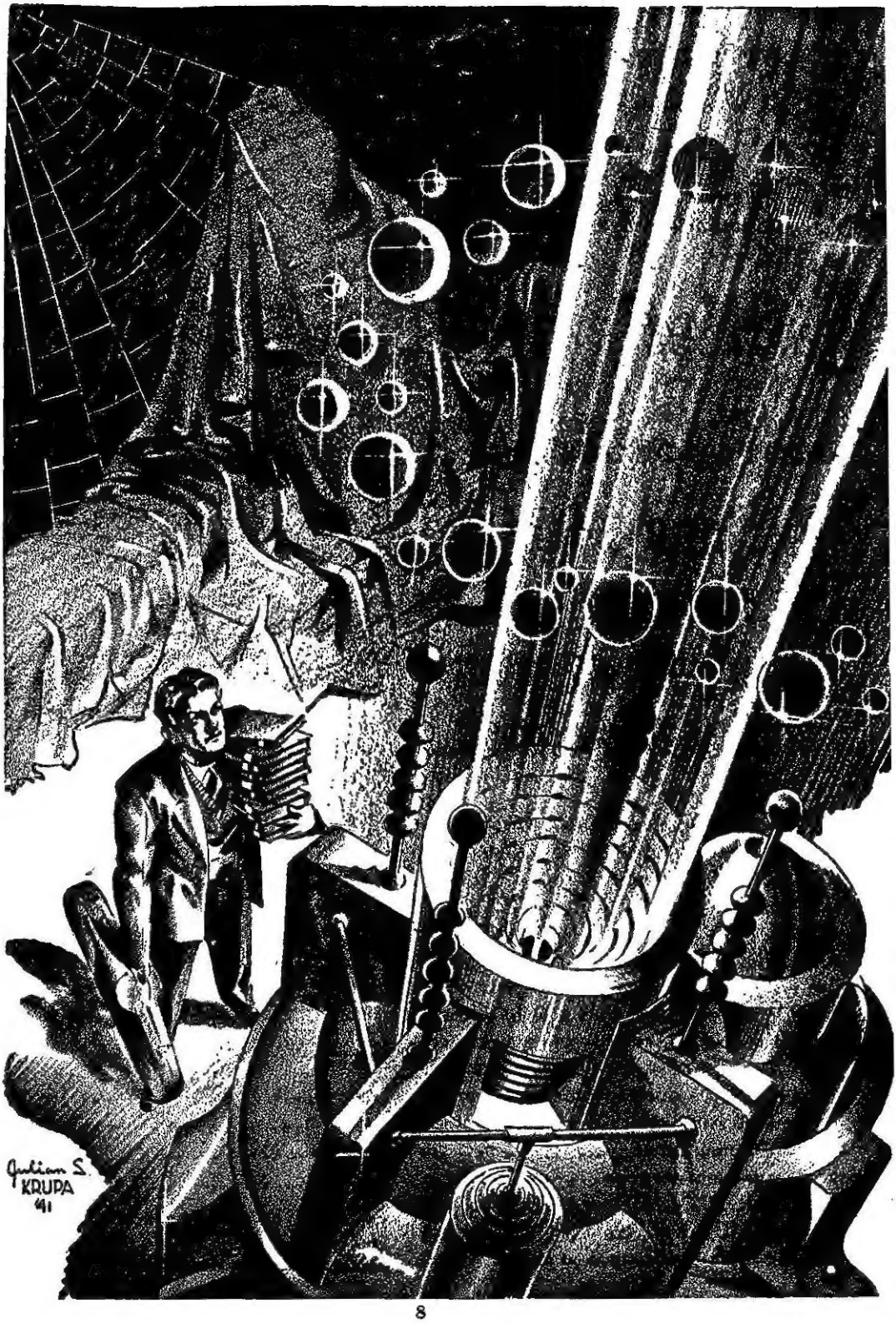
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41

The LOST RACE Comes Back

by DON WILCOX

There was a strange power in these mysterious lights.... the power to carry a man 25,000 years into the past--or 100,000 years into the future....!

VINCENT HARRISON grumbled at himself with every step. "I'm a sap," he thought, scowling at himself in a passing display window. "My spring vacation's practically gone, and what have I done with my time? Nothing. Nothing but run errands for other people. I'm a sap."

He recounted his injuries as he trudged along. That was the way with vacations. You look forward to them for weeks, and when they come you don't get a thing done. Everyone horns in on your time. Everyone from your grandpa down to your neighbor's yowling tomcat.

You run errands for your Aunt Minnie. You look up old acquaintances for your college professors. You lug your saxophone into a repair shop because your orchestra leader has got to have a saxophone player in his spring concert and you're the only one that can cut the three-measure cadenza he wrote into his new original composition, The Symphony of Time.

"I'm too accommodating, that's my trouble. I'm everybody's wheelhorse and everybody's errand boy and—look at me, loaded down with a saxophone case and an armload of Aunt Minnie's books," he temporarily overlooked the fact that some of the volumes were his own biology reference books that he had taken out of the library on Aunt Minnie's card, and that the saxophone was very much his own. "Tomorrow this vacation's over and I've only had three dates with Lucille and one with Marge, and I haven't worked in more than five hours of bowling—and hell, I haven't even started practicing that symphony."

He snorted at the thought. Symphony of Time! Original composition by Maestro Stenovo O. Galancho in four movements. With a long, slow andante movement. That was a laugh. Time doesn't move that way.

There's nothing slow about it. Ask any college student on his spring vacation.

Vincent stopped at an intersection and consulted a notebook. He checked over the items. 1. Get the saxophone repaired. (Yes, he'd done that.) 2. Return library books. (He was on his way, the long way around.) 3. Call Marge for date. (He hadn't forgotten that.) 4. Look up Xandibaum, 23rd and Oak. (All right, everything was done—or would be, before he got back home.)

The address of Xandibaum took him several blocks out of his way. So far as he could remember, he had never traversed this street before. The house was much like all the others of the block—an old frame structure with a mansion-like elegance in spite of being crowded in too closely among its neighbors. An iron fence surrounded it, but the gate was open. Vincent started in.

HE was met by the custodian of the place, who came out the front door donning his hat and gloves.

"Xandibaum?" the custodian shrugged. "He ain't here."

"Will he be back this afternoon?"

"Couldn't say. He never says when he's comin' back."

Vincent weighed his baggage and grunted, "Long walk over here for nothing." He started to go reluctantly and the dismal-faced old custodian followed him out to the walk. Vincent said, "So you don't have any idea when he'll be in? Did he leave the city?"

"I couldn't say. The day I came to work here he gave me to understand that how or where he came or went was none of my business. So long."

"One more question," said Vincent as the fellow got into his parked car. "Just when, to your best knowledge, did Mr. Xandibaum leave? This morning, or this noon—or was it yesterday?"

"It was four years ago this Easter." The custodian drove off.

"Smart guy," Vincent muttered as the car rolled away. "Well, at least I can go back and tell my physics prof that I saw his friend Xandibaum's house."

Vincent's gaze at the structure led his steps forward toward the front porch. He noted the name "R. O. XANDIBAUM" set in one of the concrete steps. He noted the narrow stone walk that led around to the rear and was half tempted to follow it. Something that his physics professor had said about this man Xandibaum tickled his curiosity. He sauntered idly around the house, recalling that conversation.

A far-away look had come into the physics prof's eyes upon learning that Vincent lived in this city.

"I don't suppose you know a man named Xandibaum—a scientist—no, you wouldn't, of course. He doesn't mix with the public much. I wonder what he's doing. . . ."

The physics prof's voice had droned away in a reverie of memory, and Vincent had broken in with, "You wouldn't want me to look him up, would you?"

"Yes—yes, I would—very much I would, if you don't mind." And then the physics prof had dropped a few hints as to Xandibaum's curious career. The eccentric old thinker, he said, had always attended the scientists' conclaves year after year, and always had tried to make a stump speech about some of his revolutionary theories about a universal something that he called a *time chain* that transcends the present—that is, it links through the past, the present, and the future. . . ." Again the physics prof's voice had mumbled away into something incomprehensible.

"It sounds daffy," Vincent had commented.

"That was what all the scientists thought. Old Xandibaum used to try to insist that this *time chain* could be tapped in a thousand ways for scientific experiments. But the science conventions would laugh him off the platform. And the fifteenth year that he tried to put over his speech, they threw him out bodily. I've never heard of him since."

"Gone hermit, maybe."

"No doubt. But if he's still living in your city, and you can get word to him, tell him that I, for one, am still pondering over some of his radical theories." With that the physics professor had wished Vincent a good vacation, and Vincent had gone off musing over the strange ideas.

Now he looked up to find himself at the rear door of the old house. A neighbor's dog came barking down to the fence, and a genial, portly man, working in the neighboring yard, struck up a conversation with Vincent.

"I had hoped to find Mr. Xandibaum, the scientist," said Vincent, and in a minute he had gone over the story of the errand

for his physics professor, the meeting of a moment ago with the custodian, the custodian's blunt answer that Xandibaum had been away for four years.

The neighbor puffed at his pipe.

"He was right about that, my lad. Xandibaum hasn't been seen for four years. He's dead, of course. But that custodian's too thick-headed to realize it. Says he's just gone on some mysterious journey and he'll be back someday. Wanna go in and take a look at the scientist's stuff?"

"Huh?"

"Sure, go ahead. You can't hurt anything. The basement door's right there on the back porch."

Vincent hesitated. "You're sure it's all right?"

"Sure. I go down every day or so to borrow tools—usually my own that the care-taker has forgot to bring back. . . ."

Vincent started to set his saxophone case down on the back porch, but fearing he might forget it, he lugged it along down the basement stairs in his left hand, with his books under his left arm.

THE passage beyond the tool room was coated with dust and draped with spider webs. He blew the dust off the scratch pad that hung on the door knob. It read:

"William: I'll be out for a short time. Please see that nothing is disturbed."

Vincent opened the door and went in.

He didn't turn on the light. There was already a glow of lights from a distant corner of the big room—a circular string of what he took to be miniature light bulbs. At a glance, they gave him the impression of an illuminated string of pearls floating horizontally in the blackness.

For a moment he was slightly disturbed to think that the careless custodian had left these lights burning. At once the objects in the room engrossed his attention, however, and he was completely absorbed. He spent several minutes trudging slowly through the aisles.

Each table of apparatus seemed more formidable than the one before, painting higher and more grotesque shadows on the wall.

Suddenly it occurred to Vincent that the shadows were gradually rising all over the room. That is to say, the string of illuminated pearls from the farther corner of the room had been gradually descending all the while.

A chill ran over Vincent's shoulders and down his arms. He clutched his luggage and made his way through the shadows over to the corner from which the light was rising.

His nerves quickened. The circle of little lights was almost to the floor. What would happen if they touched? Would they crash out? He glanced back to catch the general direction of the door, in case he should be left in darkness.

Down—down—the lights floated toward the floor, and for an instant they must have touched. At least they suddenly reversed the direction of their movement. Now they were rising.

With his free hand Vincent mopped his brow. They were rising as gently as they had fallen, the whole formation, as horizontal as the floor itself. All in all, it was too much like a magician's trick for comfort. Vincent bent closer.

So far as he could see, those lights were not suspended from any visible wire. Were they controlled by the strange apparatus built around and beneath them? He glanced upward, searched the space overhead for a trace of puppet strings. What he saw was a patch of open sky high above him—for directly above the chain of lights was an open air shaft that rose vertically through the house.

Had these little balls of light floated down through that shaft? Were they going to make a return trip and escape through it? Vincent gulped.

In appearance the little blobs of light were illuminated marbles, as big around as the end of your little finger. Their glow was dull and slightly colored. They gave forth no sound or smell or feeling of heat. They stood—or better, swam—in the same definite arrangement, a few inches apart, constantly in a single horizontal plane—a plane that was slowly rising.

Now they floated above the level of the books hooked close within his left elbow. His eye traveled from one side of the circle to the other. The lights were very mysterious indeed, for they were indeterminate. They faded away into the blackness like the tails of comets, giving him the impression that their influence might extend a great deal farther than he could see.

"Damnedest thing I ever saw," he muttered half aloud.

He stood so close now that he could have

passed his hand over a score or more of the lights with a single stroke.

He thought of doing so. He made several tests to convince himself that they were giving out no noticeable heat, that they were not strung together by wires, nor supported from above or below. He passed his hand between two of them. Nothing!

The physics professor's words echoed through his confused thoughts: "A universal power—a *time chain*—a power that can be tapped in a thousand ways for scientific experiments. . . ."

Vincent barely touched the ball of light nearest him.

INSTANTLY there was a brightness like daylight all about him. The sudden change frightened him so that his hand jerked back through the light blob. The blinding light vanished.

Vincent stepped back, trembling. He hugged his sax case and his books, and took a deep breath, casting his dazzled eyes over the lowering shadows of the laboratory instruments. Well, everything seemed to be safe and sound, and he had to admit to himself that he hadn't experienced any burn or electrical shock. And actually, there hadn't been a sound to frighten him. Nothing but the sudden brightness.

Okay, he thought; if this is simply a slick way of turning the laboratory lights on full blaze, he'd do it again.

Which one of these numerous lighted marbles had he passed his hand through? He was proud to find that he knew the answer. Swift though it had all happened, he had made one definite observation. There was a clean-cut color division in this article of lights.

The light ball nearest him and all the others extending away to his left were of a bluish cast.

But the one he had touched, he was dead certain, had also gone blue at his touch—but as his hand had jerked back through it, it had returned to its original reddish tone.

Likewise, all the other little spheres of light on his right were reddish.

He touched the nearest red one again. Again it turned blue—barely visible in the blinding brightness that simultaneously swept in.

It was a brightness like all out-of-doors. In fact, if he could believe his dazzled eyes, *it was the out-of-doors!*

The glimpse of a completely changed scene shot panic through Vincent. The impression that the laboratory had suddenly been swept away, and the whole city with it, leaving him out in broad daylight in the open countryside—it was all so frightening and uncanny that his hand struck out in a frantic, uncontrolled gesture, *through ten or twelve of the little lights.*

It was a wild, impulsive swing of the arm that anyone might have made under the circumstances. But far from combating the unseen power, his action unleashed a thundering, roaring, splashing fury! *The rolling sea! It was tumbling in upon him!*

It was impossible, it was unbelievable, but it was there—inescapable. Storm-tossed waters were all about him. His feet were going down into water. He glimpsed a landless horizon.

The only thing before his eyes that had the remotest semblance of familiarity was that innocent-looking chain of blue and red lights—

He swung his hand back at them—barely reached them—flung his palm through the whole series that he had struck before. His stroke had the right effect. Solid earth bounded up against his feet, the blaze of the intense daylight was upon him, the ocean was gone!

Whatever this magic stage scenery was, it was far too real for comfort. Vincent knew he was as pale as those lights had been before he struck them back to red. He felt like collapsing. But noting the great outdoors that again surrounded him, he realized that he was still far from his original laboratory surroundings.

In other words, there were more blue lights to be touched back to red before he could walk out of this place through the same comfortable door by which he had entered.

"It's all done with mirrors;" he muttered cynically. And casting his eyes at the apparently distant horizon, he added. "Nobody could say that about *this* scene."

A BREATH-TAKING scene it was—from the rugged hills in the distance, to the wide sluggish river that flowed along with colored autumn leaves sifting down upon it, to the muddy ground at Vincent's feet. That mud had come from the bit of ocean he had just picked up in his shoes and trouser legs. He was soaked to the knees.

"Where am I?" he called out loud, trying to break out of his paralysis of astonishment. "How the hell did I knock out that ocean? . . . Oh, yes! The *lights!*"

The lights were still slowly floating upward. His eyes combed them sharply and focused on the one that might restore him to the laboratory. The laboratory where the machine that gave birth to this weird circle of time-changing lights.* He leaped and struck at it—and *missed.*

A wild terror seized him. He leaped again, and a third time. The things were rising out of range.

Again he glanced at the vista about him, the water at his feet, the sloping hillsides, the river, the distant sunlit horizon. Fake or real, this scene was something he had to dissolve quickly or not at all. He set down the saxophone case, leaped from it—and missed. The lights were getting away from him.

He set the case up on end, tried to climb up on it. He made two false starts, then succeeded in mounting. The string of lights was just out of reach. He leaped—and the saxophone case turned. He went down in a heap to the ground.

That ground was the real thing—a coarse sandy soil, the kind that clings to your socks and shoes when you walk along a riverside with wet feet.

Vincent sat down on the saxophone case, pulled his books up on his knees, and gazed heavenward. The warm sun boiled down on his face. A whiff of breeze sent a few red autumn leaves whirling past his feet. He did not see them.

He saw nothing except the circle of luminous marbles high overhead.

The little ring of light climbed up—up—up. Its faded lights grew fainter. At last it melted away against the background of a pearly cloud.

CHAPTER II

Twenty-Five Thousand Years Ago

"A TIME CHAIN," Vincent mumbled to himself. "An infinite, universal, timeless power. . . . Hmmm. . . . Xandibaum's been gone for four years, has he? Four years. . . ."

Vincent lay in the warm sand and squinted his eyes at the bright sky. Slowly he removed his wet shoes and socks, never taking his eyes off the soft white clouds overhead.

"Four years. . . . Xandibaum must have liked the climate. . . . Okay, he can have it. . . . Me, I'll take the next train back. I'll wait right here till that time chain comes back—whether it's ten minutes or ten hours."

Ten minutes later he added, "or ten days," although he contented himself that he would surely not have to wait that long.

If it hadn't been for that terrifying encounter with the open sea, and the chilling reminder in the form of cold, wet feet, he might have induced himself to believe that this was all a very pleasant dream. It *was* pleasant. No one who had been in the rush of winding up endless errands at the close of a brief spring vacation—not to mention filling college notebooks, and sandwiching in too many social engagements—could fail to appreciate an hour of this.

Or maybe two hours. Vincent glanced at the sun. The afternon was wearing away, and little breezes hinted that a cool autumn evening was coming.

Strange, this autumn weather. It was as if he had been transplanted into another world—a quiet, peaceful world of nature and beauty. And he had definitely gone into another day.

Whatever the day or the world, there were no signs of civilization anywhere about. No houses dotting the distant landscapes, nor highways, nor railways. Not even any fences.

He listened sharply, thinking he might hear a locomotive whistle somewhere in the distance, or an airplane droning across the sky. All he heard was the gentle swish of autumn leaves falling.

Then from the distant bend of the river he caught the dim echo of men's voices. He

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* Obviously the machine invented by the mysterious Mr. Xandibaum is fixed in our own world of 1941, and the circle of time-defying lights which possess the power to energize any object touching them with the time-energy of the particular time-world to which it is attuned, exists not only in our world, but in other worlds, simultaneously. Perhaps it is the fluctuating of this ring of energy through the various phases of time which makes it rise and fall so mysteriously upon each time-world. Naturally, to our eyes, and senses, travel through other than three dimensions would be impossible to perceive. Thus, the up-and-down motion is the only indication we could have of the actual motion of the time lights through the unknown dimension of its true motion.—Ed.

stacked his luggage on the ground and strolled down to the water's edge. From there he could see the group of fishermen, a mile or more distant, plying along the river in little black boats.

He trudged back to his original landing place and resumed his watch for the return of the time chain. Apparently his wait was going to be more than a matter of minutes. He hoped the fishermen wouldn't come along and question him, for he felt instinctively that the best explanation he could muster would be met with skepticism.

He glanced at his watch. Eight o'clock! So that was what time it was back home.

"Darn it, I've missed my dinner already. I ought to be on my way to my date. That sun fooled me." This new day he'd dropped into stood at four or five o'clock at the most. Again he felt a feverish urgency to get back. The first thing he'd do would be to get on a telephone and reel off some excuses.

What a hell of a mix-up. If he didn't get into the library yet this evening, Aunt Minnie would have to pay a fine of six or eight cents on her books, and she'd raise Cain about that. And how!

And that little blonde Pi Phi had been counting on this evening of all evenings—not so much on account of Vincent as because of that new swing band scheduled for the Silver Slipper.

Vincent paced about uneasily. What sort of story could he hatch up that would hold water? This was one clear case where telling the truth was out of the question. No one could be expected to understand without first knowing about Xandibaum. And no one knew Xandibaum. Even Xandibaum's own custodian had no conception of the real thing Xandibaum had done.

When in trouble, turn to a friend. Vincent strolled over to his saxophone case.

HE lifted the instrument out with the greatest of care, and unwrapped it from the wide blue velvet scarf that clothed it. Folding the scarf back into the case, he noticed the sheet of manuscript music in the lid—the Symphony of Time! Maestro Stenovo O. Galancho's masterpiece!

Of all times and places, thought Vincent, to get down to serious practice. He set the sheet of music against the pile of books, fastened it there with a couple of rocks, warmed up the saxophone reed and went to work.

Except for momentary lapses when he gazed hopefully into the heavens, he practiced faithfully for an hour. By that time he felt much better. That was one thing, at least, that he had accomplished during his spring vacation.

He became so engrossed in rambling through his memorized repertoire that he fairly forgot about his surroundings. While in the midst of "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More," with variations, he was startled by a shadow that passed over him.

It was the elongated shadow of someone's head.

He turned his eyes slowly and saw on the sunward side of him a group of similar shadows that stretched across the ground in the forms of long slithery bodies. He stopped playing, and the long shadows jerked into a restless, nervous huddle. He looked up.

Within fifty feet of him they stood, a group of bare-armed, bare-legged people—thirty-five or forty of them. For the most part they were dressed, if at all, in the skins of animals.

At his gaze, the group shrank backward. In the absence of saxophone notes he could hear the hoarse whispers of the older persons and the frightened whimpers of the young.

Vincent snapped the cap on his saxophone mouthpiece and hugged the instrument against his chest as if it had something of the protective powers of a hunter's gun. Through his dizzy thoughts flashed a series of words: Savages! Or a Hollywood picture cast—or a nudist camp—or *cannibals!*

But before he could collect his thoughts, he was blurting a broadside at them in the stoutest voice he could muster.

"Well, what do you want? Any kick against a man tooting his saxophone? It's a free country, ain't it?"

The leather-clad natives were all eyes and mouths. They were definitely pleased with this speech and they began to mumble excitedly among themselves. They made unintelligible gestures at Vincent and began to edge closer.

He responded with another toot of the saxophone, and their voices and gestures gathered excitement. Obviously they approved of his brand of music.

"Any request numbers?" he barked at them. "Tell me how to get out of this place and I'll play for your grandmother's

funeral."

THEY blinked at him, or jabbered, or puffed out their cheeks and wiggled their fingers as an encouragement to more music. Gradually they edged up to within fifteen or twenty feet of him, though the younger and more timid ones hung back. The whole gang of them were playing cautious, for that matter; for whenever Vincent would blast out with a shrill squawk they would jump back and some of the little fellows would take to their heels.

Vincent cut loose with "Pop Goes the Weasel," which proved to be good for unlimited repetitions. Never, he thought, had that selection had a more entranced audience. Each time he did a slap-tongue on the "pop" they caught a new surprise out of it.

But after two dozen times over, they came to expect the "pop" and instead of jumping back nervously, they would shout with glee. Whoever these people were, they knew how to laugh.

That was something, thought Vincent, breathing a little easier. He realized by this time that they must have been listening and watching more or less during his past hour of practice. And unlike the savages of the movies, they hadn't slipped up on him to knife him in the back.

Vincent had no thought of making friends. His sole motive was to bridge over the time that would elapse before the time chain returned, in the least disagreeable way possible. But all the while he was unconsciously taking down notes on these strange people.

They were a big race. The men—and now he observed that some of these were the fishermen he had seen earlier, for their boats were lying across the way on the bank—were huge, muscular, tan-skinned fellows who must have averaged six-feet-two. They stood straight. Their eyes were bright and intelligent, their heads were well shaped, their teeth showed strong and white when their thin lips parted.

The women and children, who had apparently come from some other direction, gradually attached themselves to their respective men-folks as the amazed audience shuffled about. The women, too, were strong and handsome, and some of the younger ones were beautiful.

"There," Vincent yelled at them after he had been playing steadily for several minutes. "That's all I know. Run along home. The show's over."

They came closer and motioned for more music. Vincent played on. He was still playing when darkness settled down upon the scene. Then it began to rain.

Most of the crowd dispersed. At last, thought Vincent, this request program was over. But he was mistaken. One of the men, whom Vincent hadn't noticed, sat where he was and demanded more music.

That is to say, he barked at Vincent in sharp, threatening tones whenever the music stopped. He also gestured with a small hand ax. That ax, made of a polished stone, was just white enough so that Vincent could follow its movement as the man slapped it back and forth against the big, crusty palm of his hand.

At last the white stone ceased to move and the whites of the man's eyes disappeared, and a flicker of lightning showed Vincent that his faithful listener had fallen asleep in the midst of the concert and the drizzling rain.

Vincent picked up his things and sought the shelter of a huge tree, where he spent the night watching the skies for a chain of lights that never came.

SOMETIME in the night he heard a jumble of native voices, the voices of young children. By the illuminations of the passing storm he saw them awaken the sleeping man and help him up the hillside and away. The man, he realized for the first time, had only one leg.

"And I was afraid to break away from him!" Vincent muttered to himself. Then he wondered whether he had been a sap or not. "He couldn't have run me down—but he might have thrown that ax. . . . Anyway before morning I'm gonna get out of here or my name's not Vincent Harrison!"

By morning his name wasn't Vincent Harrison. It was Pon-pon-pon.

By high noon he knew what his name was, and he knew that all of the sun-browned natives of these hillsides had heard of Pon-pon-pon. And when they flocked around him by the scores he wasn't in the least doubt about what was wanted. It was up to him to take a deep breath and blow some pon-pon-pons out of his saxophone.

They were wild for it. If he tried to put them off with silence, they took it like an affliction of pain. But if they got too close he scared them back with a nerve-shatter-

ing squeal.

By night they became sufficiently friendly to offer him food, which he gladly accepted. But their urgings to him to accompany them over the hillsides he definitely rejected. This was his camp spot.

For more than a week he stood by his guns. Every day his spirits sank lower. When, oh when, would that time chain return? The merrier the tunes that he played for his childlike audiences, the bluer and more despondent he became.

A cold wind swept in on the tenth day and he was miserable. He had tried to show these handsome primitives, by means of gestures, that he must stay on this spot and make his camp here. But the chilling wind, together with his fatigue and bewilderment, broke his will. When the big crippled man and his noisy children came down the hillside to tug at him and coax him with food, he went back with them.

They led him into a cave where a warm fire burned.

Beyond the fire an artist was at work, carving a picture on the wall. It was a picture of a buffalo. Vincent took one look, then in a flash he knew. These big brawny people were the Cro-Magnons, the finest, most highly developed race of the late Stone Age. They were, in fact, the first modern men; and Vincent recalled from his studies, with a thrill of pride, that no modern man ever excelled them in physique or brain capacity.

And here he was among them!

Then the full impact of his discovery struck down. He, Vincent Harrison, was somewhere on the face of Europe, twenty-five thousand years from home!

CHAPTER III

Vincent Goes Cro-Magnon

AS long as Pon-pon-pon played his saxophone he was something of a god to the Cro-Magnons. He was a creature to be reverenced. He was the maker of magic, his own peculiar brand of sound-magic, therefore he deserved the best of food and a place by the fire.

Fangler, the one-legged man, was a fierce old patriarch who was complete master of his cave and family. His word was law, and he was both feared and respected. His permission was necessary for every action, for every new venture, for every change. By his order, and under his control and guidance, new caves were built, food was stored for the winter, weapons were fashioned; and without his dictum no member of the family left the cave to take up new domain, married, or even planned to be married. He selected proper mating partners, blessed their union by his approval. Even babies were named by him. He was complete lord of all he surveyed, and master of his flock.

Thus it was Fangler who ordered a place made in his cave for the handsome, strangely dressed, young newcomer.

But when, after several weeks, Vincent began to put to use wisps of the Cro-Magnon language, he started to lose prestige. His jargon was so jumbled and his pronunciation so faulty that his efforts to talk were shocking to all who heard him.

Still, as time went on Vincent's speech was rapidly improving. But what was far more important in the eyes of Fangler's family, this newcomer possessed new and wonderful ideas—an endless supply of them. He was continually making some improvement in the Fangler's household equipment. The word spread over the valley that Pon-pon-pon—or *Ponpo,* as they soon abbreviated it—was a genius at inventions.

Ponpo made improvements in their carts by enlarging the wheels. Instead of using the roughly hewn slices of fallen logs for wheels, he warped tough slabs of wood into circles and fixed them with spokes.

By using spindles and weights strung up with cords, he managed to keep the roast turning slowly and evenly over the fire.

But the achievement that contributed most to the already legendary reputation of Ponpo was his invention of a wooden leg for Fangler.

That wooden leg was a marvel that made conversation far and wide. Ponpo himself showed a smile of pride to the Cro-Magnon visitors who came from miles around to verify the story that Fangler could now walk about on the stump of a tree.

"My home shall always be your home," Fangler had declared, heaping down praise upon Ponpo in extravagant Cro-Magnon words.

"I hope not," Ponpo had muttered to himself in English.

He could have gone, if he had cared to take his chances with an unknown world,

but here he would have the benefit of the guidance of those experienced in a primitive world—and who knew what dangers there were about which he knew nothing?

Besides, he wanted to go back to 1941. By staying here, he could remain close to the spot where the time chain would return—when the weather abated enough to resume his vigil. He'd tried several times, watching, and almost freezing to death. But no sign of the time chain had he seen. No telling when it would return, or if it would ever return. How far up did it go before it reversed its direction and came down again? Would it take months, years? Or had it returned several times already, while he was in Fangler's cave.

Right now he was stuck here, in this ancient world. But, he resolved, he'd get back someday. When spring came again, he'd camp right on the spot where the time chain had deposited him, and he'd wait till it returned!

But for the present this cave was his only home; despondent as he was, he realized that there was nothing to do but make the best of it.

It *was* an interesting home, as far as that went. Any home ruled by a patriarch who could change his moods from kindness to fierceness as quickly as Fangler, was bound to be interesting. But it was far from agreeable.

And Vincent had not been there many months before he realized that even to Hunzk, who was Fangler's oldest son, and therefore most important of Fangler's problems against the day when he should be granted full manhood and given a mate to become mistress of a new cave-hold in the family of Fangler, the home was by no means an agreeable place.

The cave was too crowded. The fire was not big enough. The heap of firewood, which Ponpo helped Hunzk replenish daily, took up too much room. So did the bins of grain, and the carcasses of game, and the hides, and the stone tables where Hunzk and Fangler chipped their arrowheads, and the artist's pile of equipment in the center of the floor.

Everything had moved indoors for the coming of winter; and taken altogether it was a caveful. In addition to all the goods and supplies and smoke and smells, there were nine people in the cave most of the time: Fangler; his wife; three young children; Penzi; Hunzk; Torlink, who was an artist and not a member of the family by blood; and Vincent himself.

If the freezing winds rested for a few days, the congestion would be relieved for a short time; Hunzk would go off on a short hunting trip, or Ponpo would go out to watch for the return of his time chain, or Penzi would venture across the hills to visit with one of her neighboring girlfriends. And certainly those three scalawags of boys who dressed in fox furs and who got into mischief at every opportunity would not fail to get out for a romp whenever the weather permitted.

On the other hand, a week of winter warmth also increased the congestion of the cave by bringing sundry visitors from the outside, and often these would stay all night; or if a blizzard swept in, they would stay for days. And *their* families would sit by their own fires calmly waiting for better weather to learn who had been under shelter and who had been frozen to death in the snow.

HUNZK and Penzi, adopted daughter of Fangler, had been friendly with Vincent from the first. Hunzk was nearly full grown, and he was already an expert hunter and a ready fighter. He was eager to escape his father's domination, and marry, and establish a cave-hold of his own. But as yet his father, an instructor in tribal customs and knowledge and an important authority among the people of the valley, had refused to confer the full rites of manhood upon him.

Penzi, Hunzk's adopted sister, was a thorn in Vincent's flesh. A cheerful, good-natured thorn, to be sure—as full of giggles as any homely, skinny thirteen-year-old girl he ever knew back in grade school. Penzi doted on everything that belonged to Ponpo: his dainty manner of eating, comparatively speaking; his preference for clean hands and a clean face; his curious clothing; above all, the mysterious books that he kept hidden away in his saxophone case.

All of which nettled Vincent Harrison.

It disgusted him to see how that little snip of a Penzi would put on airs in the presence of her friends—all because she lived in the same cave with the most wonderful of all human oddities—Pon-pon-pon.

But the real trouble began when old Fangler himself began to notice the attention that Penzi was paying to Ponpo.

Fangler was angered. This was not right. Nothing should be done unless with his permission—and certainly Penzi had not asked Fangler whether she could speak to Vincent or to become interested in him.

For a time Vincent didn't know what was wrong. He only knew that something was causing the old stump-legged patriarch to grumble more and to lose his temper more often than previously.

"It's this damned being-indoors all the time," Vincent told himself. "As soon as spring comes I'll get out of here." He took refuge, as usual, in a hazy dream of planing a house down there by the river where he could keep watch for the time chain, day and night.

A sharp bark from Fangler brought his thoughts back with a jerk. He caught the command, and wasted no time obeying. It was an order to go out and get some water —which, at this season, consisted to bring back a big ball of snow to be melted in a stone vessel.

He returned to find Fangler and his wife arguing violently. Their words were outside Vincent's comprehension. Their tempers were not. Fangler's wife, the buxom black-haired Kansleen, had a tongue that could lash like a whip when the occasion demanded.

But her voice went silent the instant she realized that Vincent had returned. All of which set Vincent's curiosity to working. Was he somehow involved in this family squabble?

Later that night while the three children and Hunzk and Penzi were still munching by the fire at the other end of the cave, Vincent, supposedly asleep on his shelf, overheard a few more grumbled words between Fangler and Kansleen.

"But for me," Fangler growled in an undertone, "she'd have died in the snow."

"You lie with a smooth tongue, Fangler," his wife retorted. "You stole her."

"She owes her life to me."

"So you want to eat her up like a wild boar."

"I only want her not to forget."

"How *could* she?" Kansleen snarled under her breath.

"I have made myself her father and her first friend. By me, she lives. Without her we would have no daughter."

Kansleen's face softened and her voice grew tender. "She is our daughter, Fangler. She has taken the place of our own daughter, who died. You will always be her father, Fangler."

Fangler gave a muffled grunt. He was somewhat soothed but not entirely satisfied.

Then Kansleen added, "Remember she is yet a child. Her affections are wild like the winds. . . But I will speak to her."

VINCENT caught enough of this conversation to guess which way the wind was blowing. He was head over heels in troubles that were none of his business.

"Here it is in a nutshell," he said to himself, after a week of sharp watching and listening. "I come bumping into a crowded family, and Penzi takes a fancy to me. I try to keep out of her sight and she tags around after me. I don't like it for my own sake. And much less for her father's sake. And her mother's all stirred up because her father's got an idea he's been disobeyed. And now he takes it out on me and Penzi both. But I got twentieth century worries that are more important."

Vincent scrunched down in bed of bearskin on straw and watched the flicker of the fire against the cave ceiling. "Twentieth centuries worries. . ." He chuckled to himself as he thought over the trifling matters that had disturbed some of the people he knew. His own mysterious disappearance, as he had often stopped to consider, must have been a shocking thing to his parents and a few friends. But whenever he thought of Aunt Minnie—or of Maestro Steveno O. Galancho, his music teacher. . . .

Well, he couldn't help reflecting that the thing Aunt Minnie must be most worried about was the library fines that were piling up on her missing books. And as for the maestro, could there be anything more tragic than the loss of part of his symphony manuscript?

Man's worries, Vincent concluded sleepily, may have undergone *some* evolution in the course of twenty-five thousand years.

CHAPTER IV

The Time Chain Returns

BEFORE Kansleen had a chance to talk with her impetuous thirteen-year-old, the family friction ignited into a physical fight. It lasted for only two or three blows —brief but effective.

It began when Vincent, coming into the

darkness from the bright sunlight, accidentally stumbled into Fangler. Without warning the old man unleashed his power of authority in a staggering swat across Vincent's cheek.

The sound of that blow was followed instantly by another as Hunzk lashed out with his fist. Fangler's open hand smashed against the rock wall. Fangler roared and crouched as if to tear into a whole-hearted fight. His tall, well-muscled son stood straight before him, arms folded, and the old man's roar tapered away.

The bond between Hunzk and Vincent grew tighter in that moment. Vincent, a guest in this cave, would have had no right to fight. Hunzk had taken rights in his own hands—by fighting his father—with the result that a few days later his father conferred upon him the full honors of manhood.

Late in the night, while all the others were sleeping, Kansleen and Penzi talked the matter over in low voices.

"You have been blind, Penzi, not to know your father is displeased with you. He only treats Ponpo this way because you drive him to it. If you will do more reverence to your father he will give you his kinder side."

"But I thought reverence was only for the sacred artists who make pictures on our cave walls."

"That is the reverence our customs demand. But the reverence for your father is a reverence that comes from your heart. Your father is very fond of you, Penzi."

"I suppose he is," said Penzi, looking thoughtfully into the red coals. "Though sometimes he doesn't act like it. Sometimes I wonder—"

"What?"

"Whether it makes any difference that he is not my real father?"

Kansleen gave a little start. "What—what do you mean, my child?"

Penzi stirred the coals of the fire roughly. "You know what I mean, Mother. I'm not really your child. Fangler stole me from one of the tribes far to the south of us . . . when I was still a baby . . . after your own child died."

"Penzi! How did you know this?"

"Hunzk told me. He tells me everything. We understand each other. He will always be my brother. And you will always be my mother, Kansleen. But whether Fangler will always be my father I do not know. It depends—"

And there the conversation had ended, for there had sounded the ugly growl of a cave bear at the entrance of their home. On the instant the household had aroused out of its deep snoring. Everybody went into action. The three little children yelled with fear and delight. The men grabbed their huge stone mauls and raced to the entrance, while Kansleen and Penzi quickly followed with torches in their hands.

Vincent always felt helpless on such occasions. He wasn't seasoned to meeting bears and panthers in hand to paw conflict. He could only get in the way of the others—which might be a disastrous thing to do. So he hung back and watched Hunzk fly into the fray with his heavy stone sledge hammer.

Close behind Hunzk was Torlink, the artist; and back of him stomped old Fangler, shouting orders, already paving the way to take credit for the kill. It was Hunzk, of course, who struck the staggering blows. But Torlink, the artist, was also a good fighter—a fact which amazed Vincent, for Torlink spent his daytimes in a sort of sacred sleepiness, breathing sluggishly through his thick lips while he worked at his picture-making on the walls. Torlink seldom ever spoke; he simply ate and slept and purred by the fireside like a cat. And smiled at Penzi.

Now the party had chased out into the deep snow after the retreating beast, who was probably wondering why he had ever been tempted by the delicious human smell of that warm cave.

Hunzk and Torlink battered at the fallen hulk, and Fangler came after them shouting warnings. "Look sharp, there! He'll get up and charge. Let *me* at him!"

Meanwhile the three children with their bows and arrows surrounded the bear from a safe distance of fifty yards, and shouted at the tops of their lungs that *they* had him and everyone was safe. But no one paid any attention to the three young rascals except Vincent, who by this time was getting a great kick out of the scene, in spite of the snow that was freezing his bare feet all the way up to his knees.

While the big animal was still twitching and squirming, Fangler got in his share of official death blows. No one else could strike the bear with Fangler's master touch. He knew how to kill without damaging too much of the meat. Licking his lips, he re-

minded them all that there would be juicy bear-steak tomorrow and for many days to come.

No one doubted it, and no one doubted that the valley would soon hear how Fangler had saved his sleeping family from the ravages of this ferocious beast, and how he had chased it far out into the snow fields and finally overtaken it and killed it—practically single-handed. And this time he had not lost a leg in the bargain!

WHETHER it was the talk that had passed between Kansleen and Fangler, and Kansleen and Penzi—or whether it was the victory over the bear—the spirits of the Fangler cave-hold rose wonderfully. Everyone was gay and busy and friendly. The bright-eyed little Penzi was kind to Fangler and she would tell her friends—within his hearing—how proud she was to have so great a man for a *father*.

"See how much more than most men he is. Even with one less leg, he is the bravest of men and the most skillful of hunters."

Fangler, in turn, ceased to snap at Vincent. He spent more jovial hours before the fire, baking his naked brown shoulders and gaunt hands, recounting his great exploits of the past. Vincent was strangely warmed by his friendship. And one morning after Fangler had slept too close to the fire and had awakened to find that his wooden leg had burned to ashes halfway up to his hip, his friendship for Vincent waxed warm indeed—and Vincent went to work carving out a new wooden leg.

The artist Torlink passed the hours in silent work in his sacred corner of the room. The three youngsters played at killing bears and lions outside the entrance to the cave. Mother and daughter worked the hides up into clothing. Vincent accompanied Hunzk on some of his exploits for game and firewood. Fangler talked to anyone who would listen while he worked at his flints. And the winter days passed away.

On the first bright warm morning Fangler hobbled away with a sack of food slung over his back. He would be gone many days. He would make the rounds of all the caves in the valley to see how the tribe had fared through the winter.

During his tour his ego expanded wonderfully, and he returned after three weeks expecting a hearty reception from his family.

In fact, he had hoped they would see him coming and would have hot food ready. On the last few miles of his homeward journey he could see the dot in the hillside that was his cave. His mouth watered.

He tried to cover the ground faster, but hiking over the rugged terrain on a wooden leg was hard work and his body was sore. Once he slipped and fell into a ravine and covered himself with snowy, muddy water.

But at last Fangler neared the cave. He sniffed at the air and licked his lips, and his watery old eyes brightened. The return of an important tribal patriarch would evoke great shouts of glee, and he had never felt more important. For on this journey his tribesmen had agreed to give him more authority in training the younger generation of hunters and fighters.

Slipping in through the entrance quietly, expecting to surprise Kansleen and Penzi and all the others, Fangler heard the low voice of Vincent. He paused, listened. There was no voice but that of Ponpo. This was strange. He crept closer.

Peering into the main chamber of the cave he could see his entire family seated by the fire. There was Ponpo, in the center of the group, looking into one of those odd leafy objects that he called *books*. Ponpo was getting words out of that book —*he was talking from it*—and he was putting his talk in the clear, simple, beautiful Cro-Magnon language.

On one side of Vincent was Hunzk, peering dreamily into the fire. On the other side was Penzi, leaning so close that her flowing brown hair almost brushed Vincent's cheek. Kansleen was leaning back against the wall, looking upward, her hands locked back of her head. It was curious to see her so hypnotized.

Deep-hued anger flamed through Fangler's crusty old face, and his big-veined hands doubled into knots. He cleared his throat.

Vincent looked up. "It's Fangler!" And he jumped up to extend a greeting, and so did all the others.

But Penzi's excited words blurted forth above everyone else's to crush the moment of greeting to the earth.

"Oh, Fangler! You must hear the wonderful story *Ponpo* is telling us!"

SO it was *Ponpo* that was wonderful, was it? It was *Ponpo* that must have all the praise and glory! No matter if he,

Fangler, had tramped all over the valley through melting snow and slushy ravines. No matter if he comes home starved and exhausted after many days. No matter if he is loaded down with all the winter's latest gossip from the far ends of the tribe. It is *Ponpo's* story that must be heard!

"Get food, Penzi," the mother quickly commanded. For in Fangler's flushed leathery face Kansleen read the jealousy and the silent rage better than anyone else. "Your father is tired. He must be fed."

And in that moment Fangler, breathing fire, somehow held his tongue.

Vincent discreetly kept his books out of sight during the next few days. He spent as much time outdoors as possible. Fangler's return had made him feel like an intruder and an outcast. And of course he *was* an intruder.

And yet, he was almost willing to fight to make a place for himself—on the level with Hunzk and Hunzk's generous, robust, big-hearted mother, Kansleen. Yes, and Penzi, the little dickens.

It was a cinch that Penzi was as quick as lightning. The sharp questions she asked about his twentieth century life were amazing. It beat all how she and Hunzk, twenty-five thousand years behind the times, could grasp what he was talking about. All he had to do was give them a few simple illustrations and they put two and two together.

But if he kept on reading that history of human races to them, sooner or later they were going to demand to know what became of the Cro-Magnon race. Or rather, what would become of it!

And what would he tell them then?

Would he dare tell the truth?*

Already Fangler was disturbed over what little he had heard of Vincent's talk. But if Vincent should reveal that, according to his advanced knowledge, the Cro-Magnon race had an unseen tragedy ahead of it—what *would* Fangler and his fellow patriarchs say? They would probably tear up the earth.

"Why are you so troubled?" Hunzk would ask.

"I'm not troubled," Vincent would answer. "Or if I am, there's nothing I can do about it."

And that was, in Vincent's mind, the greatest trouble of all. If the scientists of the twentieth century were correct—if most of the Cro-Magnon race somehow *lost out*, leaving only a few minor traces of what had once been the supreme race of Europe—then, obviously, the tragedy *did* happen. Whatever the mysterious factor was that cleaned house across these valleys, the twentieth century fact that it *did* happen argued that it was futile for Vincent or anyone else to try to do anything about it here and now.

But here again, thought Vincent, was that new allegiance of his cropping out. The very desire on his part to do something for these people was proof of his wish to cast his lot with them.

He had almost ceased to keep regular watch for the time chain, as he had previously done.

But one night the time chain came down, and Hunzk, who had been advised many times to keep on the lookout for it, was coming home from a hunt in time to see it.

Hunzk raced into the cave, crying the news at the top of his big bellowing voice.

"Ponpo! Ponpo! The time stars have come down! Quick! They're out there on the ground by the river!"

Vincent shook out of his heavy sleep like something explosive. He leaped down out of his sleeping shelf in the wall, started to tear out of the cave.

He dodged back to grab his saxophone case, then darted out through the entrance and raced down the path to the river.

Before he had gone far he cut his pace. The time chain was there, all right, but it was already several feet above the ground and it was floating upward with the slow, even speed of a perfectly controlled machine. He was almost too late.

He gazed at it in awe. It had been a full half year since he had seen it, and its first appearance was still a dizzying unreality in his mind.

But here it was again—just as before,

*The mystery of the disappearance of the Cro-Magnons is one of the most baffling that faces science today. According to skulls and bones unearthed, they were a fine, intelligent race, and far superior to any type of human developed on Earth up to then, from simian stock. Apparently, to judge from their artifacts, they were possessed of a knowledge of fire, of weapon manufacture, of tools, and even of clothing, made from skins, and skillfully sewn. And yet, today, there remains no trace of the Cro-Magnon race. Almost overnight, it seems, they vanished from the face of the earth. What great catastrophe overtook them, science is baffled to understand. It is only certain that something *did* happen to them; something mysterious and terrible.—Ed.

except that as it shone against the black sky its fading rays seemed to extend deep into a vast unfathomable distance.

Here was his chance! Now he could return to 1941. He could return to Aunt Minnie—oh, oh, that library fine would be terrific now! and he could return Maestro Galancho's Symphony of Time. He could . . .

He stepped toward the time chain and stretched out his hand. Then he halted, his fingers tantalizingly inches from their goal. Did he really *want* to go back? There flashed into his mind, a bit vexingly, the impish face of little Penzi. He grew thoughtful. There *was* a lot to this world—and besides the time chain would come back again. He didn't want to go just yet . . .

Abruptly he found his hesitation had decided for him. Now the time chain was several yards over his head. He couldn't reach it. He was too late—if he wanted to return!

Vincent breathed heavily, watching and wondering long after its little pearls of light had been swallowed up in a ceiling of cloud.

"I'm sorry, Ponpo," Hunzk breathed almost reverently at Vincent's ear. "I know you wanted to go. You should have gone."

"It'll come back," Vincent replied abstractly, still looking into the skies, "and the next time I'll be ready."

CHAPTER V

Shades of Xandibaum

VINCENT HARRISON kept his pledge to build a shelter for himself by the river bank. He moved out of the Fangler cave and resumed life in the makeshift camp that he had built with his own hands.

It was the first time in his life that he had ever actually been on his own resources. But he felt not the slightest desperation on that score, for he had learned a lot about hunting; moreover, Hunzk and other members of the Fangler family were only too anxious to share their bounties with him.

Once out of range of Fangler's ugly thrusts, Vincent again revived an old debate with himself. Did he actually wish to leave this life in favor of a return to the twentieth century?

If he were an intruder and a thorn in Fangler's flesh—*yes*.

But if he were an independent man, providing for himself, becoming an authority on the planting of seeds and the building of shelters and tools—maybe *no*.

There was certainly something more tangible about living in the Cro-Magnon age. Your enemies were things you could see and feel—like cold and hunger and snarling wolves and creeping snakes and hostile men.

Of course there were hostile men in the twentieth century, too. But here among the Cro-Magnon you *knew* who was hostile and who wasn't. And your enemies weren't disguised into forms you couldn't fight back at. None of your troubles here were so elusive as unjust taxes or technological unemployment or political privilege or class prejudice. No, they were chiefly troubles that you could make some impression upon with a stone ax or a bow and arrow or a reasonable amount of hard work.

And so, although Vincent had moved down to the river bank to be ready for the time chain if it should come back again some day, still he was not altogether certain what he would do about it when the time came.

The more he thought about that string of lights, the more he yearned to know whether a definite control of the thing might be developed.

"Probably that was what Xandibaum wondered too," he once told Hunzk, recounting his original knowledge of the scientist. Hunzk listened intently, especially when Vincent related having struck a series of the lights and found himself temporarily sinking in midocean.

Vincent reminisced, "I'll never have a narrower escape than that as long as I live. If I hadn't touched those lights back to red, I'd have gone down for good."

"Probably that is what happened to your scientist, Sandi—"

"Xandibaum. Yes, I think you're right. He was no doubt trying to learn to control the device and it sank him on number twelve—or whatever the case was . . . I've got a theory that every one of those little lights shoots you forward or backward so many thousand years to the very minute—and whatever spot on the earth happens to come up at that minute is the spot where you land."

And from that point Vincent found himself involved in a discourse on the turning

of the earth. Hunzk and his three young brothers and their adopted sister were all ears.

It was against Fangler's command that the members of his family came down to listen to Vincent's dangerous discourses. But as often as the old man hobbled away to visit a neighbor, they came. Every page Vincent read from his books whetted their appetite for more.

ONE day Hunzk and Penzi brought a stranger with them to see Vincent's wonderful books. The stranger was a tall, graceful eighteen-year-old girl.

"Her name is Lindova," said Hunzk, and the girl and Vincent gazed at each other. "We have told her about you—how you came through the sky from another time and are waiting to go back. She was afraid to come and see you, but we have brought her."

With characteristic twentieth century modesty, Vincent felt somewhat awkward to be wearing such ragged clothes in the presence of company. His original suit and topcoat had worn away during the past months, until now they were only a patchwork of remnants crudely sewn into a single garment. He felt like a half-naked savage—in the presence of a beautiful native princess.

"I have heard of you, Lindova," said Vincent, smiling. She blushed and shrank back a little closer to Hunzk, who took her hand. Vincent added, "Our friend Hunzk never returns from a hunting trip through the West Valley but what he comes home talking of you. Now that I have seen you, I understand. It is no wonder that Hunzk likes to go hunting in the West Valley."

Hunzk and Lindova smiled at each other and the girl blushed deeply. What a contrast she was, Vincent thought, to that little tom-boy of a Penzi. This girl was ripening into womanhood. Penzi was still a child of fourteen, careless of her hair and dress, as untamed as a squirrel. Penzi usually had a dirty face, and her large hands and feet were always marked with scratches and stone bruises.

The puzzle to Vincent was that Penzi exhibited such a fondness for him. After all, they did belong to two different ages. While Vincent might linger here for a few years, he wasn't going to let himself fall for *any* of these Cro-Magnon girls. A definite barrier would prevent that; namely, the fact that in his highest scale of values all Cro-Magnons were twenty-five thousand years behind the times.

"We have brought Lindova to see your books," said Hunzk as they all settled down in the warm sand in front of Vincent's shelter. Penzi had already slipped into "Ponpo's treasure-box," the saxophone case, and got them.

"Let me show Lindova the funny spiders," said Penzi excitedly.

"All right, the spiders," Vincent snorted. It was curious what an impression that "spider book" had made upon these simple-minded primitives. To them it ranked right along beside the books that traced the history of the human race and described the wonders of the twentieth century cities.

And yet this spider book was, in Vincent's opinion, only a fanciful pseudo-scientific treatise upon future evolution, written by some imaginative scientist, probably cracked, for the purpose of scaring the daylights out of such readers as Aunt Minnie.

"See, the spiders are as big as men," Penzi pointed out gleefully. "That's what will happen in a time many, many, many years to come."

"By that time," Hunzk chimed in, "these great spiders will have become the masters, and the men will be prisoners and slaves."

Lindova looked into Hunzk's eyes seriously. "*You* would never be the slave of a spider, Hunzk!"

"I would not!" Hunzk's muscles tensed and his great brown chest filled defiantly. "I would fight!"

VINCENT smiled. It amused him to see how seriously they took this book. INSECTS, THE FUTURE CONQUERORS OF MAN, by none other than his old friend R. O. Xandibaum! The title suddenly gave Vincent a start. Up to now he had regarded Xandibaum's book as fiction, but now . . .

He had to admit that there *was* a certain logic about it. It was remotely conceivable that the future wars would drive men underground. It was barely possible, he grudgingly admitted, that the deadly gases used as weapons, in conjunction with other counteracting gases, might have a somewhat stimulating effect upon certain types of insect life.

But if he admitted that much to himself, he found it hard to draw the line anywhere in this strange, uncanny argument of

the inevitable R. O. Xandibaum, published in 1940.

Through countless generations, so the argument ran, the insects thrived. They grew larger. Their life habits, particularly those of the trapdoor spider, were adaptable to man's underground habitat. The conditions were far more ideal for them than for man.

Simultaneously, the native cunning of the spider, his highly developed instinct for imitation, and his superior treachery—these qualities underwent an even greater evolution than his physique. In the course of thousand of years he became man's most formidable *potential* enemy.

But the monster trapdoor spider, so the story ran, was clever enough to bide his time. Vincent wondered about that. Why trapdoor spiders? Because Xandibaum *knew*, had *seen* them?

No great intelligence was required on the spider's part to discover mankind's greatest weakness. It lay in man's traditions that caused men to fight among themselves—not from an instinctive urge to kill each other, but from a vicious circle of social pressures that gathered more momentum with every generation.

The monster spiders bided their time, Xandibaum's book predicted. They took advantage of man's wars. And eventually, within a hundred thousand years, they emerged as man's conquerors and exterminators, cleansing the whole earth of the human race. Xandibaum said the future, but his book betrayed a certain vagueness. He wasn't *sure*. Maybe it had been the past. It was this factor that now struck Vincent as pointed indication the book might not be *pure* fiction.

"Don't take it all to heart," Vincent warned, noticing how intently the three handsome Cro-Magnon heads were bent over the illustrations. "It's nothing to worry about. It won't happen for a hundred and twenty-five thousand years—maybe."

"I don't like it," said Hunzk. "The more I think of it, the more I get mad. Why won't these future men fight? *I* would fight!"

"Of course you would, Hunzk," said Vincent, looking thoughtfully far across the valley of cave dwellers. Again the overhanging tragedy became a cloud over his thoughts. Would he ever dare reveal to this proud, strong Hunzk what the twentieth-century scientists knew of *Cro-Magnon's fate?*—that the bulk of the Cro-Magnons were somehow vanquished or lost in the not-far-distant times.

For many minutes the dark-eyed, beautiful Lindova looked at the books without uttering a single comment. At last she said, "My father once had some of these."

"What?" Vincent looked up sharply. "Your father had books?"

"Not books—*bugs.*" She pointed to the little black letters on a printed page. "He once had a strange bright stone with these little funny-shaped bugs on it."

"You don't understand," Hunzk put in, proud of his superior knowledge. "These little funny-shaped black things are not bugs; they are words. Your father couldn't have them on a stone. They only come from Ponpo's land. They don't grow like leaves on trees."

"They were bugs like these," said Lindova stubbornly. "They were cut on the strange stone he found."

"No, Lindova," Hunzk insisted. "The weather makes curious marks on stones, but these marks have a meaning—"

"They were the same as these, Hunzk."

The positive note in Lindova's tone was not wasted on Vincent. He rose abruptly. "Lindova, will you take me to your father?"

THE four of them hiked across the hills and up the shallow canyon that was Lindova's home. They found her father, an alert, pompous old man, sitting out in the sunshine in front of his cave making arrows. "I've brought you company, Vorsto," said Lindova.

He looked up at Lindova and Penzi with a sly twinkle. "Why must you girls have no-good men always at your heels?"

"They have come to see you," said Penzi, scruffing old Vorsto's long tangled whiskers. "This one is Ponpo, who has come to us from another land."

"A-a-awf! A stripling with a lily heart. I know all about him, from the day that he washed up out of the river. Begone, you young ones! I must make arrows and hunt before the summer is gone."

"Father," said Lindova, firmly taking the arrow out of his hand, "Ponpo wishes to see the strange stone you found—the stone with all the little marks—"

The old man pulled aside his long bushy beard and pointed to the string of copper beads that hung from his neck. "There

is part of it. . . And here is some more." He displayed anklets and bracelets made of smooth little beads that had evidently been cut from a *plate of copper.* "Had you forgotten, Lindova?"

At once Lindova remembered. Of course, Vorsto had carved one end of the "stone" into ornaments. And the rest he had traded to a traveler from one of the tribes far to the south. She turned to Vincent regretfully. "It is all gone."

Much talk followed. Now that Vincent's curiosity was aroused, he would give anything to know what that "stone" looked like before it was carved into ornaments. He would even be willing to make a journey to the southern tribes if there was a chance that the piece of copper had not yet been damaged.

But this seemed unlikely. Moreover, Hunzk at once warned that a journey southward would be dangerous. This, aside to Vincent.

"Why?" asked Vincent.

"Because," Hunzk glanced toward the cave to make sure that Penzi and the others were out of earshot, "Penzi was stolen from a southern tribe. She would not dare go back or they would take her. She bears certain marks—"

"*She*—what has *she* got to do with it? *I* am the one who would go. No one else would make the journey."

"You do not understand, Ponpo," said Hunzk. "Penzi has chosen you, and she will go with you wherever you go. Later, by the tribal custom, you will ask her to marry you."

Vincent turned his face toward the breeze and fought off the perspiration. The rush of heat through his chest and face was like anger, but Vincent knew that now was not the time to give way to impulsive talk.

"I must warn Penzi that I may not be here long," he said, looking at Hunzk squarely. "When did Penzi make this—er—official announcement?"

'She has not made it yet, and when she does you will hear Fangler's roar all over the valley. But she has told me, for I am a brother to her. She will not change her mind—"

A shrill call from Penzi brought their conversation to a halt. Both the girls and the old men were beckoning to them to come.

"I have them for you!" Vorsto barked. "I no longer have the stone but if it is only the bugs you want—"

Vincent was conducted into the dark cave. Lindova got a torch. Vorsto worked at a shelf until he succeeded in sliding a slab of dry, hard clay onto a flat piece of wood. He carried it out into the sunshine. It was somewhat cracked and crumbled, but Vincent saw at once what it was: the offset which the old man had made from the copper plate upon a piece of clay. He had saved it as a record of his strange experience.

The letters of the impression were in reverse and a few of them were missing, but Vincent quickly pieced the inscription together:

"This place has been visited by R. O. Xandibaum, scientist, 20th century A. D., by means of the time-transfer power of nature, controlled by a device of his own invention. Approximate date of this visit: 25,000 B. C."

CHAPTER VI

Time in His Hands

IT was several days before Vincent and old Vorsto became well enough acquainted to share confidences. But at last the pompous old Cro-Magnon loosened up and gave Ponpo the facts—facts that he had never told anyone before. He had been too skeptical of his own eyes, and he did not care to be made the laughing stock of the valley.

In substance, old Vorsto himself had seen a man appear out of thin air one night as he was returning from a fishing excursion. Or more accurately, the man had appeared out of a circle of little lights. The man had been dressed much as Vincent was dressed upon his first appearance.

The man had seen Vorsto and had obviously been frightened. The man had thrown something down on the earth and then had waved his hand into the curious little line of lights. Instantly, man and lights had disappeared.

Vorsto had watched for the rest of the night but had seen nothing more. Only by daylight was he brave enough to pick up the shiny square "stone" that the strange figure had thrown to the earth.

"I was so sure I saw him that I dreamed his face for many nights afterward. It was a sharp face with a long pointed nose and

a black blotch on the left cheek. All of those details I could see by the light that was floating down past his head." Old Vorsto's eyes glistened as he talked. "But one thing more I remember that has always puzzled me. Why did he throw down only one of the square stones when he had a whole armful of them?"

"From the reading of that stone," said Vincent, "I think he must have had several more stops to make, and no time to waste. But we'll never see him again. By the time he got twelve or fourteen stars down the chain, I'm very much afraid he sank to the bottom of the ocean—and all the rest of his copper plates with him."

"He won't ever come back?" Vorsto asked, much relieved.

"I think not. But if he does, you can step right up to him and call him by name. His name is Xandibaum."

Hunzk looked startled.

"The same man who wrote the spider book! Then it *is* true!"

Vincent looked at him queerly, and a chill ran down his back. Then he shrugged off.

"Maybe," he said, not at all sure of himself.

Penzi and Hunzk and Vincent took their leave. On the way back home they turned the matter over this way and that, and in spite of all of Vincent's efforts at explanation there were still many baffling mysteries.

"Here is one thing I can't get straight," said Penzi. "Are there many time chains or only one?"

"Only one, so far as I know," said Vincent.

"But did you come here on the same time chain that Xandibaum came on?"

"Yes. It's like I told you, I picked up the time chain in Xandibaum's own house. He had evidently started the thing there, for there was a special air shaft that it worked through. And as I've often explained, as soon as it touches the ground or a floor, it reverses its course and climbs back out of reach. Goodness knows where it goes."

Penzi was not satisfied. "You say it always comes down at the same place for each age."

"It must have," Hunzk put in proudly. "We know it has come down by this riverside at least three times, once for Xandi, and twice for Ponpo; and it always came down in Xandibaum's house through the air cave—"

"Maybe there are lots of time chains," said Penzi, "one for each *age*, as you say—"

"But Vorsto disproved that," said Vincent. "With his own eyes he saw the time chain appear with Xandibaum and disappear with him. That means that the time chain jumped through the ages *with* him—"

"All right," said Penzi. "Suppose he *did* drown in the ocean twelve or fourteen *ages* ago. Why didn't the time chain stay in *that* age? How did it get back to Xandibaum's twentieth-century home if he didn't strike it back and go back with it?"

The three of them trudged along in silence for a time pondering Penzi's question. Vincent had no ready answer. He felt sure that Xandibaum hadn't come back and stopped in the twentieth-century or the custodian and the neighbors would have known it.

"Perhaps," said Hunzk, "an ocean wave struck it and sent it back after Xandibaum had sunk out of reach. *It* shot back through the ages but he didn't."

"Possibly," Vincent admitted, "or Xandibaum might have thrown a copper plate at it and struck it back." He recalled his own temptation to try to bring the thing back within touching range by hurling a stone at it. "Something like that *must* have happened," he concluded. "Anyway, I know how to use it now. . ."

He glanced at Penzi, jogging along, tossing her head back and forth rhythmically. She was the picture of rugged, carefree youth, Vincent thought. It was hard to believe that anything could hurt her deeply. He bluntly announced: "I'll be leaving this country as soon as the time chain comes my way again."

TWO years passed.

Two very long years they were—two years that brought Vincent Harrison closer to the soil that surrounded his shelter, closer to the forest that filled the nooks among the hills where game could be found when Cro-Magnon hunters were lucky.

In two years Vincent saw the time chain three times more.

Three times he watched it rise into the skies, sometimes against the blackness of night, sometimes against the blinding white clouds of mid-afternoon. On one of those occasions he lay sick with a high fever,

wondering how near death he might be. That time he longed to go back, and would have gone if he had been able.

The other two times he stood by and watched the lights float down to kiss the earth and slowly rise again. He stood by with his arms folded. Every muscle was tensed but he did not move. He watched the miraculous display of power pass within inches of his strong brown hands. He counted the lights as they wafted past him, his eyes following first the blue and then the red—each extending outward into infinite distance and melting away into nothingness.

After each visit, a sickness came over him—the sort of nostalgic sickness that comes when one has looked forward to a reunion with scores of old friends, and then for some reason does not see them.

What was it, Vincent asked himself during the blue weeks that followed these occasions, that made him pass up his opportunity?

Was it—could it be—the grip of friendship of these Cro-Magnons upon him?

True, he had come to dress and talk like one of them. He attended their ceremonies. If he had not been so young they would have made him a master of the arts of farming and tool-making. Strange to say, his music and his reading had not worn out for them, but rather had made him a popular visitor throughout the tribe. His stories of far-off times and places were food and drink to them.

Before the coming of the autumn, the fourth anniversary of his arrival, he fought the matter out with himself and set his plans definitely.

By this time he knew precisely when to expect the autumn arrival of the time chain. It would come in with the equinox. That had been the case every time he had seen it, beginning with his spring college vacation of four years previous—from which he had leaped instantly into a Cro-Magnon autumn.

He set his plans. He decided in what manner he would dispose of his few possessions. He decided in what hasty, brusque words he would say his final farewells to the Fangler family and his other close friends. He concluded it would be best to wait until the last minute to announce his plans.

One by one he notched off the days of the summer on his crude wooden calendar.

Hunzk came for his reading lessons and took the book back home with him for study. Each new day he would come back with new and disturbing questions. Vincent answered them listlessly.

But Penzi did not come back with Hunzk. Penzi was no longer annoying Vincent with her company. Not since that day that the three of them had walked home together from Vorsto's had Penzi thrown herself in Vincent's path.

Sometimes Vincent saw her. That was inevitable, for good weather and tribal gatherings always went hand in hand.

When Vincent did see her it only strengthened his determination to leave this age and this land as soon as possible.

The reason was that Penzi had become beautiful.

She was seventeen now, and she was a very different person from the little thirteen-year-old raggamuffin who had listened so eagerly to Vincent's fireside stories that first winter. Now Vincent could not look at her without seeing the prettiness of her lips and her round peach-like cheeks and the soft lustrous clouds of dark hair that fell over her shoulders.

Vincent knew instinctively that he must go back to the twentieth century soon or he would never go back.

SOMETIMES he wondered whether Penzi had made her official declaration of whom she would choose to invite her to marriage. He supposed she had, though he had ceased to pry Hunzk for items of family or tribal gossip.

One of the books that Vincent had reread dozens of times included a detailed story of the rise and fall of the Cro-Magnons, and the mystery of their vanishment.

A little patch of clouds drifted out of the eastern horizon and the moon slid stealthily up into the vast dome of blue. The faint sounds of the gurgling river were the only music of the serene night. It was intriguing to stop and think that there were endless ages of time like this—but a throb of action was beating in Vincent's blood.

"I'm the only one who knows that this race is doomed. Whatever their fate is to be, I have the means of escaping it. The way out is mine—no one else's.

"I'd be a fool to invest any more of my life with a race that is headed for a dead end. All the friendship and work and love that I might plant here will be fruitless in

the long run.

"Of course if I'm just living for the pleasure of here and now—with no thought of where this old human race is going—with no *responsibility*—"

Vincent Harrison found himself lost in thought. A change had come over him in the past four years, and suddenly he saw it etched as clearly as the moon against the sky.

Four years ago he had fallen into this age all hot and bothered about returning some library books on time and practicing some maestro's composition and getting some notebooks filled and having some dates that would enhance his prestige in his fraternity.

But four years in a new age, with a few books and tons of quiet thought and hours of talk with men who were groping for the basic elements of civilization—these things had given him an insight and a perspective. . .

A perspective on mankind as a whole—what it was and where it was going. . .

And now here he was lying out under the bright moonlit sky, sleepless, pondering, charging himself with *responsibilities* toward the whole of the human race.

"If the Cro-Magnons are headed for a dead end," he repeated, "I'd better get back to the twentieth century where I belong." He muttered his words aloud. "I'd better get back. . . If nothing else, I owe it to my descendants."

"Talking to yourself?" came a voice out of the darkness.

Vincent looked around to see Hunzk approaching by the river path. "Oh, it's you."

"A bad night to sleep is a good night to talk," said Hunzk. "I have many things I need to talk over with you."

CHAPTER VII

The Time Chain Once More

HUNZK dropped down leisurely and propped his elbows against the warm sand. Vincent stood, arms folded. He was at once on the defensive, an unusual attitude for him in the presence of his closest Cro-Magnon friend.

"Go ahead, Hunzk," he said in a cool, uncommunicative manner. He waited, staring out into the skies, thinking how this same bright night would look from the top of a skyscraper. His fraternity had had a skyscraper party once, and he remembered vividly how he and another fellow and their dates had slipped down to the museum floor and persuaded the guard to let them browse through the relics, even though it was after hours—and how the girls had shrugged at the sight of artifacts from races dead and gone, and begged to be taken back to the moonlit roof garden. . .

"Ponpo," said Hunzk casually, "I am troubled until I cannot sleep."

"Why?"

"Because something is going to happen to my race."

"What?"

"I do not know. Even the men of your century did not know. But whatever it is, it is coming soon."

"Do you see any dangers about you, Hunzk?"

"If I could see the dangers, Ponpo, I would fight them. I would organize this whole valley to fight them. It is not the dangers which can be seen that I fear. It is the dangers that I cannot see. . ."

"Perhaps you are borrowing trouble," said Vincent. He strolled down to the river's edge and bathed his perspiring face and neck. Hunzk followed him.

"It might be war, though we have never had any great fighting among us in recent years. The tribes to the south never do more than threaten. Or it might be disease—"

"Hunzk," Vincent interrupted, "how long have you been thinking these thoughts?"

"Only since Penzi read to me—"

Hunzk put his fingers to his lips and tried to take back his words. Vincent, who had started to scoop up another handful of water, stopped motionless. "Penzi has been *reading?*"

"I have been teaching her, just as you have taught me," said Hunzk guiltily. "But she forbade me to tell you. . ."

Long after that night's conversation, the news about Penzi still thumped through Vincent's arteries. From the first, he had marvelled at the ability of these Cro-Magnons to accept the twentieth century knowledge and outlook. If this fine race had only survived to get the benefits of the manifold developments of the centuries following their disappearance, what a proud race they would have been!

So Penzi, as well as Hunzk, was learning

to read and think on Vincent's level! And Vincent was not supposed to know. It occurred to him that many things may have happened in the Fangler family which he didn't know.

Vincent cut another notch in his wooden calendar. The days were growing shorter. Summer was passing. Soon would come the equinox. . . .

WEEKS later a shrill voice rent the afternoon stillness. "Ponpo! Ponpo! Come quick! Come!"

Vincent thought someone must have been murdered, the way the young son of Fangler was yelling. He leaped from his perch above the cave entrance and bounded down the path toward the frantic child.

"What is it, my boy?"

"Hurry! Penzi wants you!"

"Where is she?"

But the youngster took no more time to answer questions. He led the way down the hillsides with the nimbleness and speed of a hunted rabbit, Vincent following.

The course led straight to Vincent's own shelter. "What would Penzi be doing there?" His whirling thoughts could find no answer. .

"Hurry, Ponpo!" That was Penzi's voice. "You can still make it!" She was running beside him. "The time chain . . ."

"And we're going with you, Ponpo!" That shocking announcement boomed forth in Hunzk's big voice. As Vincent rounded his shelter he came upon the party of them —the other two children jumping up and down with excitement, Hunzk and Lindova arm in arm and dressed for travel—and rising above the level of their heads, the gleaming time chain!

"No time to lose!" Hunzk barked. "If that thing will take three of us, Lindova and I are going to risk it. Here, let me lift you, Ponpo! Hold tight around my waist, Lindova—"

Before Vincent could catch his bearings, the strong arms of Hunzk lifted him off his feet and held him high. The little blue and red glowing dots were right before his fingertips.

In that crucial second of time Vincent's old rebellion against leaping out of this age once more surged through him. Even with Hunzk and Lindova going with him, he was being *railroaded* out. He was being packed off. Penzi thrust the saxophone case into his arm.

Penzi reached for the lights

He caught it under his elbow. Then, on a decisive impulse, his hand seized Penzi by the wrist. His other hand swung at the first of the blue lights.

But the swing took Hunzk slightly off balance—with the result that Vincent's hand struck through a full score of the reddish lights.

The reeling sensation lasted only a split second. It was the sensation of a harmless tumble of the human pyramid—Hunzk Lindova, Vincent and Penzi—plus the saxophone. They all fell to the ground—*different ground.*

Vincent jumped to his feet and whirled on Hunzk.

"What did you do that for?" he asked angrily. "Now there's no telling where we are . . ." he paused to stare around, saw a primitive forest, and no sign of living thing ". . . this isn't 1941, certainly, and that's where we wanted to go. I hit the right light, all right, but you made me hit a whole string of them. We might even be in the world of the insects, 102,000 years in the future."

"I hope so," said Hunzk eagerly. "Then we can fight!"

Penzi looked around, speculation in her bright eyes.

"No, I don't think we are in that age," she remarked. "This looks very much like our own world, back in 25,000 B. C."

Vincent stared at her, then looked around soberly. "Yes, it does, almost," he agreed, "except for one thing . . ." he pointed, "off there, through the trees, I see a building. There were no buildings in your world."

Hunzk uttered a loud cry, and followed by Lindova, he bounded toward the clearing Vincent had indicated.

"Let us go see it!" he shouted.

Vincent bit his lip, and grabbed Penzi's arm.

"Come on," he said. "He is foolish for running blindly ahead. Maybe there are dangers here. If I'm not mistaken, that building is in ruins."

"I saw that, too," Penzi agreed.

"You did?" Vincent looked down at her. "Sharp eyes, haven't you?"

They went after Hunzk and Lindova, soon caught up with them, standing beside the ruined building, staring at it in puzzlement.

"There is no one living here," said Hunzk in a tone of disappointment. "It has fallen down."

"Not *fallen,*" corrected Vincent in perturbed tones. "That building has been very thoroughly wrecked! Almost as if by a . . . war!"

Lindova's brow wrinkled. "A war?"

Vincent nodded. "Yes. That building is only a few years old. The mortar is comparatively new. Even the smashed bricks are not covered with moss. But there's something funny about this building. It isn't modern. It isn't even the kind of a building you'd expect from a future world, past 1941. It's almost a primitive building—such as the Cro-Magnons might have built, had they surviv . . ." Vincent halted abruptly.

Hunzk looked at him. "You might as well have said it, Vincent. I have been thinking it too. Our race vanished. Maybe it was destroyed—by something." His big fists clenched. "Maybe it was the insect world that destroyed it!"

Vincent snorted. "Now you are letting your imagination run away with you. The insect world is supposed to be 102,000 A. D. The Cro-Magnons disappeared long before my own time, 1941. Maybe 15,000 or 20,000 years before . . ."

"Maybe the insect world *wasn't* 102,000 years in the future," pointed out Penzi suddenly. "Xandibaum wasn't sure, in his book. Maybe he didn't *know* for sure. Maybe this world we are in now is the insect world, and maybe it *is* between our two times, Cro-Magnon and 1941."

Vincent snorted again. But he was disturbed. This little Cro-Magnon miss was as sharp as a razor. Maybe she was wrong, but she wasn't as uncertain as anyone else in this confounded mess. What if she were right . . .

"This is dangerous, standing here," he said abruptly, glancing nervously about. "If this *is* the world of the trapdoor spider . . ." he shuddered.*

"Perhaps some of the people are still alive," said Penzi. "Maybe we can find them."

"Maybe there are no people," Vincent

*The trapdoor spider is the strangest of the spider family. As a general rule, they live alone, except for mating time. They build underground homes, with an entrance on the ground, sealed by a hinged trapdoor. They lie in wait behind the door, and when an unwary insect comes near, pop out and drag the victim down to a certain and horrible death.—Ed.

reminded. "After all, we don't know for sure which age we really are in."

"If this is an age between ours," she said stubbornly, "there should at least be *pithecanthropus.*" Penzi had learned her lessons well. Vincent looked at her with ill-concealed amazement.

From that time forward, he discovered, Penzi was going to amaze him frequently. None of the things he had taught Hunzk out of the books had gone to Hunzk alone. They had been passed around.

"We'll have to look out for wild animals, and avalanches, and poison foods. . . . We'll do well to stay close together until we're sure of our ground. It's six months until another equinox," Vincent advised.

"We'll stick together," said Hunzk, and it was plain that any two people as devoted as he and the beautiful Lindova would not stray far apart.

"We'll stick," repeated Lindova.

"In union there is strength, as one of your great men said," Penzi quoted, winning another look from Vincent.

"And we'll keep our eyes open for our human ancestors. Sooner or later we'll find them. Maybe," Vincent was not too confident, "we can convince them we've got a lot in common."

IT WAS gratifying to Vincent to see that Lindova and Hunzk were not greatly disappointed over missing their expected trip to the twentieth century. They were, in fact, very much excited over what they found here—and daily there were new, thrilling discoveries. New ruins, the remains of a road built of red stones, and once an encounter with a sabre-toothed tiger.

"That makes *me* right!" Penzi had proudly observed after Hunzk had killed it with a poisoned spear. "This *is* 20,000 B. C."

But Hunzk and Lindova were captivated by the thought that the time chain would come back, and they were confident —even more so than Vincent—that there could be endless additional travel into different ages, so long as they didn't let that time mechanism get out of their grasp.

"They've got an outlook on this time business," Vincent thought to himself, "that's ahead of mine. Here I've been trying to locate in some age where I can live in comfort. They've got a hungering to take a look at life all down through the centuries . . . ."

Vincent shuddered a little. He certainly didn't feel comfortable here.

And yet look at Lindova and Hunzk, cuddled up in a corner like two turtledoves, browsing through history books, chattering about how some day they'd go and see if those things really happened—if they could get Vincent to go with them.

"I'll go, too," Penzi put in, never taking her eyes off the fire where she was roasting a delicious young hedgehog," if I get to ride the time chain to 1941 A. D., and live with those future people, I guess I'll be as modern as anybody."

"Has anyone ever said you weren't modern?" Vincent asked carelessly.

"No one had to *say* it," Penzi answered. She swallowed a blob in her throat and turned her face away from Vincent.

He sauntered close to the fire where she was working, caught her bare arms, drew her back a little. She tossed her head back and looked up at him, and her soft hair fell against his hands.

"You're working too close to the fire, Penzi," he said softly. "Your cheeks are warm."

"From being slapped," she answered, "three years ago."

And then she was in tears—tears that Vincent could only partly understand, being a mere twentieth century man. But he had a general idea what to do about tears from the eyes of a gorgeously beautiful girl. He and Penzi walked out along the mountainside trail they had marked, and he kissed her for the first time—and the second and the third—and time stood still.

Nobody seemed to mind that the delicious young hedgehog roasted to cinders that evening.

BUT everybody minded a few days later when an earth tremor fairly buried them all under a minor landslide and they had to dig their way out from under the protecting cliff and gather up their possessions and make a new camp up on top. They were still on the site of the time chain, and there they would stay at all costs. For they were already making big plans and counting the days until this six months should pass.

An upsurge in excitement came when they caught their first sight of some fellow human-beings.

But they weren't human beings after all.

They were apes. And they were very shy. Neither Vincent or Hunzk could get near then, but Hunzk had a peculiar look in his eye.

"They are much like the apes of the Cro-Magnon age," he said. "But I heard some of them talking, and I almost swear I could understand a word or two here and there. If only I could get closer . . ."

"If you could, they'd probably kill you," said Vincent. "Better keep away. A sabre-tooth tiger is strong on the ground, but an ape is strong in the trees also. They could pounce down on you before you'd know it. And from what I've seen of these fellows, they are crafty. They might lie in wait above your head . . ."

Hunzk grinned. "Let one of them jump me," he boasted. "He will find he has landed into the middle of a real fight!"

Lindova smiled up at him, but there was a nervous look in her eyes. "You are brave, my husband, but please don't look for trouble. I wouldn't want to lose you."

"Smart girl," observed Vincent.

They saw the apes several times in the following weeks. And Vincent always found Hunzk looking at them with a strange gleam in his eyes. And Hunzk spent a great deal of his time working. He was brewing poison for his spear tips, and making new spears.

"When you stop to think of it," Hunzk observed profoundly one day, "this whole business of how fast we develop is the most fascinating puzzle in the world."

"Listen!" Lindova said, smiling proudly. "Hunzk is about to give us a lecture."

"On *modern* man," Penzi put in, never missing a chance to use that word *modern* within Vincent's hearing. There was no longer any doubt with Vincent that they were all modern, comparatively speaking, in thoughts as well as physique.

"Here's the point," said Hunzk, and he wasn't referring to the newly trimmed spear, whose point he was tipping with poison from the fangs of a dead snake. "Those ape creatures out there in the forest are floundering in their struggle. What they do with their *time*—today, tomorrow, next year—can make all the difference in the world in how far their race gets. Every victory over a tiger or a wolf or a deer puts them ahead. But if they could only start working with tools, they'd go thousands of years ahead in one jump."

"That's easy for us to see," Vincent smiled, "because we have the advantage of a later viewpoint."

"Will future men say things like that about us moderns?" Penzi asked. Vincent watched the firelight burn in her wistful eyes. He wondered how she would look in a twentieth century dress.

"If we knew what future men would say about us," Hunzk went on, "what would we do, Ponpo?"

"What would we do?" Vincent repeated absent-mindedly. His eyes and his thoughts were on Penzi, and the direct question was disturbing to his romantic reverie . . .

A few days later Hunzk brought up the same question more pointedly. "If we had future men's perspective on us, would we see that we were wasting our opportunities, the same as those apes. Are we making the most of our tools—our *time chain*, for example?"

The question struck home to Vincent. "We've got all the time there is in the world, Hunzk. What do you think you ought to do with it?"

Hunzk considered. There were lots of immediate things that could be done, as soon as they got back to the Cro-Magnon age. Hunzk's father needed care. The cave needed to be cleaned and re-provisioned for the winter. There was much that Hunzk owed to the home . . .

But there was his own and Lindova's needs to consider. It seemed to Hunzk a larger purpose, as far as his tribe was concerned, for him to provide a cave for Lindova where she could have babies.

"And yet there may be still more important courses of action," Hunzk reflected gravely. "If there is some danger approaching all of my people . . ."

FOR the first time Vincent and Hunzk talked this matter over frankly. Lindova and Penzi joined them. They talked of traveling over the Cro-Magnon valleys to hunt for hidden perils. They would visit the hostile Cro-Magnon tribes to the south. They would scour the country, and if they could foresee what threatened, they would prophesy—

Again Vincent felt the shock of futility. If the scientists of the twentieth century knew that something *did* erase great numbers of Cro-Magnons—

"Then let us leap to the *hundred-and-twentieth century*," Hunzk suggested. "Per-

haps they will know *what* erased us, and we can take measures—"

"But if it *did* happen," Vincent protested. It was an *if* that brought back the silence of futility. The four of them gazed into their campfire for a time, and when the talk picked up it was of things near at hand—the calendar that promised the return of the time chain, Hunzk's supply of poison-tipped spears, Lindova's souvenirs of this lost age that she wished to take back, and Penzi's new dress.

The new dress was Penzi's spare-time activity. Vincent had taken the materials from his saxophone outfit and made a gift of them to her. He had stripped every square inch of the blue velvet lining of the case, adding to it the wide blue velvet scarf in which he wrapped the instrument. Saxophone springs had been easily converted into needles; pads and keys were available for ornaments.

It was a handsome gift—a twentieth century dress for a very modern girl. Vincent wished he could have told Maestro Galancho to what good use his sax and case had been put.

With that gift went a new understanding—and a promise from Penzi to Vincent. When they got back to the Cro-Magnon age they would be married . . .

Hunzk was keeping watch for the time chain through the night when the answer to his problem burst through like a light. The others were sleeping, or trying to. But with Hunzk pacing about and talking to himself, they waked up to see what it was all about.

"It about making the most of our time," Hunzk was pounding his fists together. "I think I've got it."

Vincent sat up and stared blankly. He saw that Penzi and Lindova were instantly alert. This matter might be abstract to a twentieth century man with comfortable living dumped in his lap, but to these Cro-Magnons, facing extinction—

"Perhaps *we* are a lost cause!" said Hunzk grimly. "What these book writers of Ponpo's age know seems to prove it. But after all, is that the biggest problem?"

"What *is* the biggest problem?" Vincent asked groggily.

"The extinction that comes later—to *all* men—when the insects grow big and take command!" Hunzk paused, knowing that Vincent was likely to snort at this. Hunzk wasn't in the least disturbed by those snorts. "You don't think there will be any changes after twentieth century, Ponpo. Why don't you have the same faith in Xandibaum's spider book that I have in your skyscrapers and airplanes and radios?"

"I have seen airplanes and radios," Vincent answered stubbornly.

"I have not—but they sound logical after I have studied all the magic changes. But no more logical than the huge spiders and grasshoppers which Xandibaum's book describes."

"It's different," Vincent retorted. "That spider stuff was published in the twentieth century. It's bound to be guesswork. If I thought there was a grain of truth in it, of course we'd load up with weapons and get on the time chain and see—"

And so the punch in Hunzk's big wonderful idea—and with it the hope of making their time count for the utmost—seemed lost. And none of them would think of trying the long jump into the future against Vincent's better judgment. Vincent's judgment was their law.

And at any rate they would take the next six months or year in the age of the Cro-Magnon—in the interests of married life.

Vincent's judgment was their law, and it was usually good. But the very next day his dogmatic verdict that the monster spiders of the future were just so much nonsense got knocked topsy-turvy. And the whole argument that Hunzk had been advancing took on new light.

Penzi, having ventued a short distance out of the forest, came screaming back. "A spider! A giant spider! *And it's coming this way!*"

CHAPTER VIII

"Once This as a City"

R. O. XANDIBAUM laid down his paint brush at the sound of the buzzer. He stole a hasty glance at his watch. Nine a.m. The Trapdoor Monsters were right on the dot again this morning. In his eight years of captivity he had never known them to vary as much as five seconds in their Monday morning roll call.

Xandibaum hurriedly jumped into his shell, strapped it on snugly, switched on the silent motors. He applied pressure to

the rheostat switches by moving his knees apart. The spider legs of his mechanized shell went into action. He swiftly ascended to the top of his cylindrical home. Hard against the closed lid, which always reminded him of a solid locomotive drive-wheel fitted into the top of a cistern, he waited.

The buzzer sounded.

Xandibaum touched the switch that elevated the trapdoor. It swung up with a hard jerk and held there. He pushed his shell-clad body halfway outdoors.

Simultaneously five thousand other trapdoors flew open and five thousand Trapdoor Monsters swung halfway into view.

The five thousand monster spiders that occupied this open plaza and similar groups living in other plazas were the most precise and orderly society of animals that ever lived, in Xandibaum's opinion. He knew exactly what to expect from them from day to day.

As long as he could continue in his disguise, and could fulfill the simple responsibilities that fell to him, he might live on indefinitely.

The instant he should fail in any way, and they should discover him, death would be certain—and probably *quick*. Only a few of the most highly developed of the monsters had allowed themselves the luxury of playing with their human victims, during these recent final years of man, before killing them and adding them to the food storage rooms.

Now, from the arched doorway which was all that remained of a once stately building, one of these more high developed Trapdoor Monsters stood viewing the vast semicircle of open trapdoors. That arched doorway had been built by man, to man's dimensions. The monster fitted into it neatly, his legs resting against the side-walls, two of them up in the curve of the arch.

A picture of ruins! After eight years of imprisonment here, following his years of study that had given the twentieth century a book on this tragic era, Xandibaum still felt the same pang when he looked out across the five thousand half-open trapdoors, coated with debris, to the monstrous form that occupied one of man's last doorways.

True, there was one building, half a mile beyond, that was still standing in all the stately elegance of its advanced Cro-Magnon architecture. It was beautiful and inviting—and sure death.

There was that much left in each of the new, young, Cro-Magnon cities. One inviting building! That had been the monsters' cunning scheme for bringing in every last human being.

An amplified voice from Six-six-six, the monster spider that occupied the commanding position within the battered doorway, sputtered and clacked and chirped.

XANDIBAUM listened tensely. The language was an elusive thing. As far as numerical expressions were concerned, Xandibaum was sure of himself. He knew his own number—the number he had assumed after he had succeeded in killing his predecessor.

He also understood, from the speaker's mood and the listeners' responses, whether work, or food, or orders for the domesticated monster grasshoppers, or training of the young in the arts of treachery and cunning were being talked about.

But after all these years he still could not actually identify *words* that he could translate as such. So much of their communication was based upon their highly evolved instincts—which could be awakened in them by tones of voice and vibrations of legs and bodies—that he missed the subtleties.

Fortunately for Xandibaum, the Trapdoor Monsters had clung to their instinct to live separately, later to be passed on to their descendants, the *trapdoor spiders*. Xandibaum's cylindrical hole in the earth, together with all the chambers and connecting tunnels he had added for his own scientific and clandestine needs, was his own domain.

Only at moments like these, when all the community was called up for the regular roll-call, was he in danger of being scrutinized too closely by his next door neighbors.

Or, considerably more perilous, if he was thrown into the society of some of the monsters on a work shift, and lacked the motor controls of his fake shell to *get by* their critical inspection, he was sometimes forced to resort to emergency measures. In a few such instances he had managed to commit instantaneous, silent murders of the monsters who otherwise would have reported their suspicions.

Xandibaum's devices for instantaneous, silent murders were the last word in man's thousand of years of death-dealing inventions. Trapdoor Monster's proficiency at post mortems was slight. The Trapdoor Monster was no scientist.

No, he was simply an imitator and an adaptor. His only inventions ran to trickery, and his wits ran to numbers and rapid calculations. He had taken over many of man's facilities that he could not understand, or repair, much less improve upon.

This amplified chirping that Xandibaum now listened to, coming from the doorway where Six-six-six stood beside a microphone, was simply a steal from vanquished Cro-Magnon man. If these communication systems ever got any overhauling it was done by the monsters' highly developed arts of imitation, thought Xandibaum, not by any intelligent understanding of—

That was his number!

Yes, Xandibaum's number had been called!

The announcement was repeated. . . . It was an order for a duty. . . . Guard duty . . . Tomorrow, on the northern boundary. . . .

There was more to the order, though Xandibaum was far from clear on all that was said. He was sure the guard duty would last several days, perhaps weeks. He thought that he was commanded to have shed his old season's shell and appear in his fresh one for this job.

Five thousand monster spiders slipped out of sight—a few of them having dumped their cast-off shells outside their trapdoors—and five thousand heavy trapdoors clicked shut. Assembly was over for today.

XANDIBAUM slipped back to this living quarters, disposed of his shell. He wrote a few lines in his diary, then picked up his paint brush and worked furiously on the new shell he would don for tomorrow's job.

All of that inner mechanism would have to be transferred, but that would be a quick job. The fastenings for that job had been fixed weeks ago.

And he must remember to load up with plenty of death bolts.

A curious game, he smiled to himself—this business of being the only man on earth! One of these days they would get him; his game was certain to end eventually.

But Xandibaum still had his own personal zest for living; and if another murder or so was the price of a few more days of life, he was good for it!

While the dark paint dried on his fresh spider shell he returned to his diary and wrote:

"Once more I am to expose myself, in disguise, of course, to these creatures in whose midst I am a hidden prisoner. This *may* be my last entry (as I have often written before). I write, knowing full well that there is no man alive to read it. I can conceive of only one possibility by which any man might find his way to this place; namely, by means of the time chain which escaped from me (through my error) to return to a future century.

"If any man should come upon this underground refuge, that man is welcome to what he finds here. The chemical processes for manufacturing food and clothing are his to use. He will do well to keep to the protection of this cave, for the deadly Trapdoor Monsters hold sway throughout the land.

It is strange that once I wrote a book, ascribing this era to the future, to 102,000 A. D. But I had miscalculated, struck the wrong light in the time chain, and it took many trips to discover my error and to return here. When I finally discovered this insect era was in 20,000 B. C., and that the civilization destroyed was that of Cro-Magnon man, after 5,000 years of amazing progress, two great mysteries were solved for me; the answer to the Cro-Magnon enigma—they were destroyed by the trapdoor monsters—and the mystery of the future of man himself. Now I have no hope to correct the error I made in 1940, when I published my book on the FUTURE of man. It is really not the future, but the PAST!

"Once this was a city—a city that extended both above the ground and beneath, and was vibrant with the warmth of Cro-Magnon life. But Cro-Magnon man's wars that drove him underground made him the victim, first to his own shortsightedness, next to the mercilessness of the deadly insects that thrived in these underground habitats, and multiplied, and organized and killed.

"Once this was a city. Now it is desolation and death."

CHAPTER IX

Death Beneath the Trapdoor

WHEN Penzi came screaming, "A spider . . . *following me!*" Hunzk and Vincent leaped to their feet. Hunzk grasped his poisoned spear in his hand.

"Where?" gasped Vincent.

Penzi flung herself into his arms. "In the clearing . . ." she sobbed. Then she turned and stared back in the direction she had come, and pointed.

But she had no need to point, for there, advancing beneath the trees, was a monster spider, its horrible legs clacking along with almost mechanical jerkiness, its horrid, half-human head turning questioningly about as it came.

It clattered up to within ten yards of them, then stopped. It stood there, eyeing them. Hunzk lifted his spear threateningly, and aimed. The muscles of his great arm tensed. Then, suddenly, the spider spoke.

"Hold it! Don't throw that thing at me. I'm your friend."

Stunned, Hunzk dropped his spear arm to his side.

Lindova uttered a little cry, and Hunzk once more flashed his spear up.

"Wait!" cried Vincent, recovering from his astonishment. "That spider talked to me in my own language!"

"It is magic," growled Hunzk. "I will kill. This thing is our enemy; it is the insect that destroyed my people. . . ."

"No, wait," commanded Vincent, laying hand on Hunzk's arm. "Let me ask it a few questions first. It doesn't seem to intend to harm us—just yet anyway."

He faced the monster insect.

"Who are you?" he asked, feeling rather foolish. It was obvious this thing was a spider, and could not possibly have spoken.

And yet, there came an answer.

"You speak English too! Then you are from my own time! I am your friend. . . ."

Suddenly into the forest came two more of the giant spiders, and the spider who faced them half whirled around.

"Trust me," it hissed. "These are enemies. Make no move. Simply fall in in front of me, and go as I direct you."

Vincent hesitated, and Hunzk bristled, although he could understand no word of what the spider was saying.

"Quick!" hissed the spider. "Before it is too late. I will make believe I have captured you and are returning you to Six-six-six."

Abruptly Vincent decided. "We will walk before him, as though we were prisoners," he shot at Hunzk. "You keep your spear ready, for the first treacherous move."

Hunzk snarled. "Why not kill now, before those other two get here. We will be helpless. . . ."

But it was too late now. The other two spiders clattered up. Suddenly, as though frozen, they stopped. They seemed lifeless.

Vincent was puzzled. But he said nothing as the spider who talked English led them away. For perhaps half an hour they walked along, in silence, and finally they drew up beside a sandy bank. The spider advanced, and a trapdoor opened.

"Go down there," whispered the spider. "And stay hidden until I come back. You will find food, and you will find weapons. Make no moves, because there are five thousand other trapdoors about here, all with spiders either in them, or returning to them. My notes will tell you what this is all about. Read them."

Wonderingly, as he allowed himself to be herded into the trapdoor, Vincent stared at the giant insect.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Name's Xandibaum," snapped the spider. "Now get in there. I can't stay another minute."

The trapdoor snapped shut.

And Vincent, his mind reeling, led the way into the depths of the spider's home.

"SO they went back to caves," Hunzk muttered in his quaint Cro-Magnon words, surveying the place. "It doesn't look quite so inviting as the homey caves of five thousand years ago."

"Keep your spears ready until we've explored," Vincent warned, still dazed at what he had heard.

"I'm scared," said Penzi, following close beside him. She managed to laugh as she said it, but her nervousness was evident. The shock of coming into this new age, to find themselves at once confronted by a huge spidery monster approaching them—speaking to them—in a language that Vincent evidently understood, was all very unnerving.

Then to be ordered about, the moment those other two spiders came up, as if the human-speaking spider had suddenly turned cold and hateful—what could one make of that?

"He changed his attitude *because* those other monsters came up," Vincent declared. "It was his only way to save face. He pretended to them that he was leading us to the authorities."

"Then we are in danger?" Lindova asked, being very calm about it all.

"Extreme danger," Vincent answered, and went on with his search through the artificially lighted chambers, the others staying close by him.

"Maybe *he* was our friend," Hunzk was not altogether convinced, having been mystified and confused by the monster's conversation. "But those other two—they will tell the authorities."

"No. You saw them go motionless where they stood? They were dead. The first one killed them with mysterious death-bolts. He is not a spider, he is a man in disguise. He told me. He is Xandibaum."

"Xandibaum!" exclaimed Hunzk.

Penzi gave a little cry and drew back at the sight of three or four huge spidery shells heaped in a corner. Material for Xandibaum's disguises and perfectly harmless, but spine-chilling.

"I'm not going to be frightened," Lindova said staunchly, trying to bolster Penzi's courage. "I've Hunzk to protect me, and you've Ponpo. We should know by now that our men can always protect us."

"We can do it," said Hunzk.

"The dangers here may be greater than we expected," was Lindova's soft-spoken reply. "But even if death were in our path, there is no place we would rather be than at the side of our men when they need us."

An hour later Lindova was dead.

IT all happened so quickly that no one was sure how it happened.

No one had heard the trapdoor open. Everyone had been browsing about through the curious equipment of Xandibaum's underground world. They had paused over the open diary. Vincent had started to read aloud. The written words had quickened the sense of danger.

Hunzk, Vincent remembered, was the first to turn, and the sudden whiteness that came into his face was a forerunner of death itself.

Vincent whirled at almost the same moment. He saw the two monsters approaching. One of them was upon Lindova before anything could be done. Its fangs struck the back of her neck.

Hunzk's spear lashed out—then Vincent's. Poison-tipped spears they were. The two Trapdoor Monsters fell with a crunching sound against the composition floor.

And Lindova sank into Hunzk's arms, her expression not one of pain but of bewilderment, as if to say, "What is this strange thing that has happened to me?" She died without knowing. . . .

They found ways to reinforce locks on the trapdoor, by which these intruders had entered. It was difficult to know just how powerful these gigantic spiders might be. Vincent knew that the tiny trapdoor spiders of his own twentieth century could counteract a pull of ten pounds upon the cork-like entrances to their homes. He knew from his study of Xandibaum's notes that the larger specimens became terrifically powerful, and he had no doubt that these two intruders had lifted door, casing and all.

Even after Vincent discovered the heavy emergency metal doors a little ways down from the entrance, he was careful never to leave the cylinder unguarded. Either he or Hunzk stood by constantly with poison-tipped spears.

They were sure that before long other monster visitors would come in search of the missing two.

And if that talking spider was indeed Xandibaum in disguise, and he had in reality killed two monsters to protect them, he might be coming here soon to hide. Evidently he was very clever. If he could get away with murder on a small scale, perhaps—

But no, at best they were only four against thousands and perhaps millions of monster spiders. Man was a thing of the past. They had proved Hunzk's worst fear—at what a cost!

They cremated the two dead monsters.

They also thought it best to dispose of Lindova's body in such a way that no insect monster could ever disturb it—and they did so with the gentleness and tenderness that was Hunzk's—his heritage from an age in which the love of a man for his mate had attained its first blush of sacredness.

THEY discovered the periscope.

They found that they could look out on the barren crumbs of disintegrated skyscrapers. They could see the strange comings and goings of the Spiders' domesticated grasshoppers. They saw these big bright yellow creatures flap down out of the skies to deposit food on the ground.

And then, to their amazement, they saw trapdoors fly open here and there. In the flash of a second's time a door would open, the monster spider would leap halfway out to grab the food and leap back again, and the door would go shut.

Except for this intermittent activity, the landscape in the periscope was only a barren open plaza of finely ground debris. All signs of the trapdoors and the life beneath them were completely disguised.

"But there is one building," Penzi said, "away to the left, toward those wooded hills."

Vincent and Hunzk located it through the periscope, and Vincent considered in silence. In his day a building such as that would have been a sure refuge from any storm but war. Obviously it was not safe to stay *here* a minute longer than daylight necessitated. As soon as night fell they would go.

Vincent mentally chartered the course. Hunzk and Penzi got their luggage gathered up for quick moving.

A shadow fell over the periscope.

Vincent looked out to see the cocky purplish eye of a huge grasshopper. The animal stood as if in obedience to some command that had stationed it here.

On either side of the grasshopper hung a sign and both signs carried the same hand-printed message:

"I'll return to you at midnight. Be ready to move.—X."

The grasshopper paced about impatiently for an hour. It nibbled at the stones, pried around over the barren ground in a fruitless effort to find something to eat, finally kicked the paper signs off its sides and masticated them.

CHAPTER X

Flight by Grasshopper

IT WAS a hard decision to make. Vincent knew, without asking, what Hunzk and Penzi thought. They believed that this speaking spider was a cunning creature that had led them straight to a pitfall. He had faked a murder of the other two spider guards to give them confidence.

Then he had conducted them to this place to make prisoners of them.

Finally, he had delegated two spiders to rush in and take care of them. It was almost miraculous that all four of them had not been killed.

Vincent himself was wavering in his faith in this creature who had said, "I am Xandibaum. Trust me. Don't mind my disguise. . . ."

Were those words simply the imitations of man's speech? Every writing of Xandibaum, from the spider book to the diary, had stressed the spider's cunning at imitation.

But there was one thing that made Vincent hold fast to his determination to stay till midnight: The last entry in the Xandibaum diary had been made recently. And it was dated only two days before the equinox.

"Xandibaum is alive unless he's died in the last two days," Vincent declared. "We've come here for facts, Hunzk. He's the man who can give them to us."

"We'll wait if that is your wish," said Hunzk.

"We'll wait," echoed Penzi, folding Vincent's arms, around her. Poor little Penzi was scared to death, but she was trying with all her might to take on the wonderful courage Lindova had shown.

"We'd better pack as many of Xandibaum's things as we can," said Vincent. "If I read the signs right *he's* got to move too."

At midnight they let the creature in, locking the trapdoors securely behind it. They kept their spears ready. But it spoke, as before, in a warm confidence-restoring voice. And in a moment the inner man stepped out of the shell to give them a friendly, if hasty, greeting.

"As I told you, I am Xandibaum of the twentieth century . . ."

While the man talked swiftly to Vincent, the two Cro-Magnons studied him. Penzi gave Hunzk a nudge. There was something she remembered—something that Lindova's father had said about the strange man who left the copper plate—

"This is the one Vorsto described," she whispered. "See the dark blotch on the left check, the sharp face, the long pointed nose—"

Now there was a tension in the talk between Vincent and this elderly, keen-faced old man, and the listeners tried to break in on Vincent for an interpretation.

"He's just learned that inspection of homes has begun," Vincent explained, "and that two monsters will come here—" He broke off, returned to his English, "Two monsters *have* come, Mr. Xandibaum."

The scientist went white. "I had no way of knowing such a thing would happen—What did they—How did you escape with—" His broken questions clogged against his tightened lips. "There were *four* of you. *Where*—"

Vincent's eyelids lowered. Hunzk and Penzi understood what tragic news was passing between these men. Hurried words of explanation from Vincent quickened the elderly man's determination to action. He paused to place an arm across Hunzk's muscular bare shoulders and utter some sympathetic words that Hunzk could not misunderstand.

Then, lifting them out of their sorrow with a quick smile, he beamed on Penzi and touched the blue velvet dress she was wearing.

"You're the prettiest thing alive, my child. Womankind could not ask for a more beautiful final representative."

Vincent interpreted his speech to her later as they were hiking along through the darkness.

THEY had strapped their luggage on the back of a huge grasshopper, an obedient old beast that Xandibaum talked to like an intelligent horse. It clattered off ahead of them through the black sky. Now and then they would overtake it, Xandibaum would wake it up and give it another direction for the next leg of the journey.

They avoided the forests as much as possible. The forests were sure to hold numerous Trapdoor Monsters that had not taken to the rigid life of conquered cities.

"If we can get through to higher altitudes," Xandibaum said, "we'll have a chance to survive. It's a thin chance, at best, but now it's our only chance."

"How soon do you think we'll have pursuers on the trail?"

"As soon as those two dead inspectors are missed. Six-six-six, one of the brainist of the monsters, will put two and two together. The two dead guards out on the boundary, and a third—myself—*missing!* Right away someone—some monster, that is—will be dispatched to investigate my living quarters."

"What if they can't get in? You locked all the extra doors, I remember." Vincent was thinking of that wonderful supply of scientific equipment for the manufacture of synthetic foods and clothing. He also thought of the scientist's manuscripts, his diary, his power-driven spider shells that had given him such a perfect disguise.

"Of course I put on every possible lock—in the last eight years one of my specialties had been to devise safeguards for my properties. But I'll be lucky if any of that stuff is spared. As soon as Six-six-six gets suspicious he'll have the place blasted."

Vincent considered this. It struck him hard to realize what a fiasco this adventure had become. And yet the whole failure hung upon that slight chance—that inspection had happened to come while Xandibaum was away.

On the other hand, if Xandibaum hadn't been away—that is, if he hadn't chanced to be on guard duty out on the north boundary of that countryside, where the time chain came down, what would have happened to Vincent's party?

Considering Lindova's swift fate, the answer to that question was only too apparent. That three of them were still alive and in the care of Xandibaum was after all more than average luck.

They trudged along silently. Vincent's conversation with Xandibaum had been relayed to the others, and it gave them all food for thought. And cause for added fears. The two non-English-speaking members of the party could not help wondering about this man Xandibaum.

Did Xandibaum hate them for coming? Had they intruded with less welcome than Vincent had once intruded upon the life of the Cro-Magnon? It was plain that they had upset Xandibaum's well regulated captive life. Unless he could appreciate the vision that had brought them here, Xandibaum had reason to hate them.

NOW the grade was getting steep along the mountainous foothills. They stopped to rest.

Dawn was showing gray and pink across to their left, as they looked back over their course. Xandibaum pointed back to certain topological landmarks.

"There is where you arrived. That is a territorial boundary, where I was standing guard. And it is the spot where the equinox of this age brings the time chain."

Now for the first time since his brief words at the beginning of their flight, the warmth of fellowship came into Xandibaum's voice.

"We've been too hurried for me to tell you before," he said, "but I appreciate from the bottom of my heart your coming. Do you realize that this courageous thing you have done gives me a hope I haven't had for eight years? You've brought the time chain up with you. It gives us all a chance to—"

Xandibaum's words trailed off into silence and in the grey of dawn Vincent saw that his sharp-lined old face gathered tenseness.

"Yes, I understand," Vincent commented. "If we can hold out for six months—"

"S-s-s-sh!"

"What's the matter?"

All voices cut down to a whisper. At a wave of the hand Xandibaum silenced them. Then they heard.

"It's people!" Penzi gasped to Hunzk.

From far down the slopes the little voices came. They were cheerful and musical and thoroughly indistinguishable. Vincent was aware at once that they were coming closer. He would have sworn that they were human voices.

"Human, nothing! That's the Trapdoor Monster's cunning imitation," Xandibaum snapped. "We're being pursued. Come on!"

They ran for half a mile along the rugged terrain. At present they dare not change their course, because there was the grasshopper and his load of baggage to be considered.

"Can—can we outrun them?" Penzi demanded breathlessly, and Vincent knew that she was good for a swifter pace. But Xandibaum was flagging.

Xandibaum's interpreted answer was that the monsters could cover ground two to three times as fast as a person.

"Our one chance to shake them off our trail is the grasshopper. He'll be waiting on this next knoll."

The voices were still a mile or two down the slope when Xandibaum waked up "Grundy." He removed a good share of the baggage, placed Vincent astride, and got on with him. It couldn't be ladies first this time, he said briefly. He would come back for Hunzk and Penzi soon. Vincent must learn to handle a grasshopper like a riding horse. In the coming six months they must all learn. . . .

Vincent dug his legs down beneath Grundy's folded wings. Xandibaum, seated ahead of him, barked a command. The giant grasshopper took a running start, sprang into the air and clattered away.

Vincent looked back and tossed a reassuring wave to Penzi. The scissors grip of his legs slipped. He almost fell! He bent to the grasshopper's back, grabbing with arms and legs for dear life—and held tight. No broncho rider at the rodeo ever had a wilder ride than this!

CHAPTER XI

Battle of Bolts and Fangs

IN a matter of thirty minutes faithful Grundy had succeeded in transferring all passengers and baggage to a point several miles from the pursuers' voices. There was a moment to breathe and eat and drink.

They were by a stream now. Xandibaum feared that the pursuers had picked up the trail by means of smell, so he had deliberately sought a stream. It meant a loss of time in their ascent up the mountainsides, and a further risk of running into the habitats of outlying spiders.

"Those are the chances we have to take," Xandibaum declared as the party waded downstream. "Those monsters will avoid the high altitudes if they can. But if they're on a direct trail they'll follow even at a sacrifice."

"We've got to hold on for six months," Vincent said grimly; and his remark brought a quick searching glance from the old sharp-faced scientist.

"That's the very point," he said, snapping his fingers. "And frankly, now that we've been driven out of my old stamping ground, I'm out of my territory. I only know this region from my study of man's maps. I don't know how the monster spiders' settlements may be distributed. But this I know: If we can shake our pursuers off last night's scent and locate in a high altitude away from any beaten trails, we can live for six months on herbs, if necessary, and they'll never find us."

The water swirled around their legs and little blobs of melting snow floated past them. Somewhere up this swift rocky stream were headwaters fed by glaciers. Long before that elevation would be reached, this party would find a comfortable altitude just chilly enough to stiffen the body of any Trapdoor Monster into sluggishness.

Xandibaum led the way out of the stream. Grundy the grasshopper listened alertly as his master barked orders to him. The beast bent down for loading—but suddenly he jumped up with a sharp sniff at the air.

"Get down there! What's the matter with you—"

Xandibaum's sharp worry lines deepened. He turned and passed critical eyes over the mossy river banks, the patch of open meadow, the forest that bounded it.

"We'd better get out of here! Grundy smells salt. It might be— Here, Grundy, I'll give you some salt."

Vincent saw that the scientist carried a small box for emergencies of this kind. Salt to Grundy was as indispensable as food to a hungry man. When a salt smell in the air caught Grundy at low ebb, he was uncontrollable until his need had been supplied.

Penzi was first to see the monster spider. She shrieked, then stifled her cry. Her arm went out rigid, pointing, trying to say what her lips couldn't.

IT was coming across the river. Not *down* the river, as they had come. There was no chance that it was one of the pursuers. There was a remote chance that it was a guard, or a new pursuer, who had been informed by a radiophone or other communication line.

It was hopping nimbly from stone to stone. It had not seen them!

It would not see them!

Xandibaum hurled a death bolt—a miniature hand-bomb no larger than a walnut. It struck. It was almost noiseless. Simply a *pooof!*

The monster spider hurdled, fell with twitching legs, floated away on the water stone-dead.

"There'll be others!" Xandibaum gasped, and he was right. Five of them came into view. The first started nimbly across the river, tripping lightly from stone to stone. It stopped, looked about. The others gathered back of it. The five of them were looking for their dead brother. What they must have seen was Xandibaum.

In the past five seconds Xandibaum had whispered quick orders and established his party in a position of temporary defense. Grundy, chewing on a mouthful of salt, had obediently crouched within the protection of a long jutting rock almost as large as himself. Back of him were the four of them, taking advantage of the animal's protective coloration.

Vincent, Penzi, and Hunzk watched through a transparent tip of a folded wing. Xandibaum held a position where his arms were free.

He hurled three death bolts. The spiders scattered and fell. Only one of the five succeeded in getting back to the opposite bank, and there he fell.

"Will there be more?" Vincent gasped, and Hunzk muttered in Cro-Magnon, "Let them come!"

Hunzk was gripping his poison-tipped spear, ready and eager. He wore a bundle of spears on his back—he had refused to let them be packed in with the luggage Grundy bore.

Vincent, clutching Penzi's hand, trying to press the terror away with confidence and courage. He nodded his head toward Hunzk, and Penzi saw what Vincent meant her to see: Hunzk the fighter!

It was good to see, somehow, in that terrifying minute when they were all four aware that a swarm of death might be closing in upon them. It was good to see Hunzk, crouched, tense, strong of body and keen of wit, hungry for a chance to fly into the merciless monsters that killed by stealth. That terrible blow Hunzk had taken—back there in the underground habitat at the edge of a monster's city—had not bled the spirit from him. It had keyed him up to struggle—to the last ounce of his blood—

It was inspiring, thought Vincent, and at the same time sickening. If this skirmish of four humans against unknown millions of monsters should be man's last stand against the insects, Vincent hoped that Hunzk would be the last man to go down.

Xandibaum passed out handfuls of death bolts.

"Save your spears," he ordered. "If it comes to hand-to-hand fighting you'll need them."

NOW they came, a score of them—and more. They seeped out from between the trees along the opposite bank of the river until the ground was fairly alive with spidery arms and legs and dark crusty bodies. Some were upright, others crouched low.

"We've got ammunition enough to kill fifty or sixty," Xandibaum cracked. "If they swarm in greater numbers than that we've only one thing to do. Strip the baggage from the grasshopper and all get astride. If Grundy can take off we're safe. If not, man's days are over."

The Trapdoor Monsters were huddling on the opposite bank, keeping out of range, evidently holding a last minute conference.

"How many do you estimate?" Vincent asked.

"Too many . . . Eighty . . . Maybe a hundred."

The Cro-Magnon voice broke in. "Why don't we throw?"

"If he can throw that far," Xandibaum said eagerly to Vincent, "tell him to go ahead *and make it good!*"

Hunzk had his own ideas. If the swarm of monsters was out of range, it wouldn't be in a moment. He sprang up and dashed into the shallow river. A third of the way across he began throwing.

The first few *poooſs* scattered the swarm into a raging, chattering chaos. A dozen or more monsters fell lifeless. The others leaped over them and spread out along the river's edge like an advancing line of soldiers.

And then they came—fast!

And Vincent and Penzi and Xandibaum threw death bolts like mad.

"Come back!" Vincent cried at Hunzk. The Cro-Magnon's muscular arm worked with the speed and accuracy of a machine. Every monster that rushed at him became another stone in the dam of stumbling blocks around him.

"Come back!" Vincent cried again. He was afraid of his own aim, with Hunzk so far advanced.

Hunzk came back—his ammunition was exhausted. Twice on his retreat he thrust a spear that counted. Then two other monsters were on him—almost. His spear jabbed deep into one of them. He wrenched at it. It broke. The other monster pounced down with fangs ready.

In that instant Vincent hurled a death bolt with all the speed his arm would carry. He watched it fly from his hands. His eyes tried to turn away. He could not stand to see where that missile might strike.

Then he saw Hunzk running back, and the monster slipped into the water, bumped against a heap of bodies and tangled black legs, and floated down the river.

Again the four of them were fighting side by side, and their grasshopper was staying with them. Together they retreated across the clearing. The spiders came on, but less aggressively. It was almost certain death for any of them to get within range of Hunzk's arm.

"Keep back, Grundy!" Xandibaum muttered. "We're going to need you."

The spiders distributed themselves widely. They were forming a circle.

"It looks like this is the size of it," said Vincent.

"They're stymied," said Xandibaum. "They're not going to get any closer—Look! There goes a party of them back across the river. *I know one of those monsters!*"

VINCENT saw the group of five beating a swift retreat. There was something distinctive about the appearance of the one in the center—it had the same look of cruel, merciless destructive intelligence as the others, but in a more pronounced degree.

"I'll know that middle one if I see him again."

"That's Six-six-six," said Xandibaum. "I wonder what he's doing here. He's the master of one of the cities, the one we—" Xandibaum's face grew tighter. "He has a home somewhat apart from the city, I never knew where."

"We must have crashed it," Vincent said.

"It's no doubt somewhere across the river, and they saw us fly in upstream. No wonder we had a hundred guards on us. Well, there's one satisfaction. We've broken the backbone of that hundred, and before they can get reinforcements, Grundy will get us out of—"

"Look!" Penzi cried. "They're starting to make webs."

The thirty or forty monsters that had trailed out into a circle at the forest's edge were busily weaving their white strands.

Hunzk looked grave. He demanded to know what was happening.

Xandibaum warned of trickery. "Between spears and ammunition, we've got the edge. In fact, if we work it right, we can watch our chances to get closer and pick them off, one at a time. But they can play the same game. In fact that's probably what they're up to. The thing we've got to do is keep watch on all sides of the circle. Otherwise one of them will slip in here silently while our backs are turned, and plant his fangs— Here come three!"

The spurious attack from one side of the ring drew the three men into a moment of quick action. They each picked their victim, their shots went true.

Then they whirled, and Hunzk saw, not fifteen feet beyond the grasshopper's tail, another one.

"How'd *that* one get in?" Vincent yelled.

The invader chased away, then flopped into a heap as the penetrating little blast of explosive overtook it.

"Can you manage Grundy alone?" Xandibaum cracked at Vincent. "Get the girl on, ride out of here. Go straight north, as far as you can get in ten minutes. Then send Grundy back. He'll know where to come." The scientist began to strip the luggage off the grasshopper's back.

"Where *is* Penzi?" Vincent blurted. *"Penzi! Where are you?"*

Three men and their beast of flight cast their frantic eyes over the clearing. Across the smooth grassy meadow the spiders were industriously stringing their web—from the semicircle of tree trunks to the jutting rocks along the river's edge. Within that circle no Penzi was to be seen!

CHAPTER XII

A Chance for Man?

"I TELL you there's no use looking any farther," Xandibaum said finally. "We've done everything in the world that can be done. You'll have to give her up, Vincent."

And in his soft Cro-Magnon tongue Hunzk pronounced the same verdict. "Their cunning has won, Ponpo. They killed her with their lightning poison. They raced away with her body before we had time to turn and see. They—"

Vincent was not listening. He would not believe it anyway. He was too stunned to do anything but tramp over the grassy meadow, searching—everlastingly searching.

The battle had ended at noon. Every last web-weaver that had not beaten a retreat across the river had paid with death.

Now it was growing late. Xandibaum was listening sharply for the expected voices of an approaching body of reinforcements.

The sun sank low, and the long shadows of the giant grasshopper lay in thin lines of blue across the grass.

"Any further delay will make the tragedy complete," said Xandibaum, taking Vincent by the arm. "I know you can't give up easily. You think that there must be one of these trapdoor habitats here in this clearing. I think you are right, for she vanished too quickly to have been carried to the river or the forest. But we have searched in vain for a trapdoor—"

"We must search more!"

"Even if there is a trapdoor somewhere in this ground, it would be so well concealed that we might search forever—"

"I'll gladly search forever—"

"Listen, Vincent," Xandibaum said brusquely. "You force me to say it. If one of these devilish trapdoor spiders pulled her into his home you would not want to look at her—afterwards. Remember her as you last saw her—a courageous little beauty, garbed in that blue velvet dress that flashed in the sunshine as she fought by your side—"

They made two trips of it, and planted their camp in a safe nook high in the mountainside.

And then Hunzk vanished too! It was a shocking blow.

"They will get us the next time they come," said Xandibaum heavily. "We haven't much ammunition left. And the poisoned spears are gone."

Vincent stared. "Gone? Isn't that odd?"

Xandibaum nodded. "It is, when you stop to think of it. If a trapdoor spider got him . . ."

There was a long silence. Then Vincent said, "May I borrow the grasshopper? I am going back to search for Penzi again."

THE faithful Grundy clattered through the starlit sky with Vincent astride, and glided down to the river's edge.

The air was foul with the stench of dead trapdoor monsters. Vincent wondered if these cruel beasts had no respect for the dead. A stir from across the river an-

swered his question. In the dim light of dawn he could see two grasshoppers at work. Their golden bodies moved sluggishly back and forth among the trees. They were gathering up the dead bodies and piling them in a heap by the river bank.

Vincent rode his beast back in to the edge of the timber, watching sharply for signs of monsters as he crossed through a break in the barricade of spider web.

Grundy suddenly became hard to manage. Salt! The beast was hungry for it, and Vincent knew, from the scientist's instructions, that it would go to any lengths to get it.

But Vincent also knew that a smell of salt in the air must have stimulated that want. That was a warning. Some *body* was not far away. It might be a dead spider, or a live one, or an injured *person* alive or dead. He recalled Xandibaum's warning.

"When they get panicky for salt, watch out for your own safety. If you've got any injuries and they smell blood, they'll go for persons."

Vincent wasn't sure what to do. "Get along, Grundy," he muttered, but the animal was going its own headstrong way—toward the source of the smell—

It couldn't be those dead monsters, for the wind was from the north, and that was leading Grundy into the forest.

Then the wind shifted, and the grasshopper whirled and stopped and refused to obey. Vincent wondered. Did he dare lead it to one of those carcasses of monsters? Would it be satisfied with a bite or two, or become drunk with a thirst for more—or even poisoned? Many miles lay between Vincent and the uplands.

In an impetuous gesture, Grundy took decision in his own front legs, so to speak. He threw Vincent off, pounced at him, grabbed him with his front feet.

In a flash it occurred to Vincent that his own perspiration was a source of danger. If he had had a shirt on his back he would have gladly given it in exchange for a chance to escape the hungry gaze of the beast's face.

"Stupid!" he muttered at himself, reaching to his belt. He tore the package of lunch free as he struggled out of the grasshopper's grasp. The package was mostly meat, wrapped in bark, and the instant he tossed it to the ground in front of the beast's eager mouth the crisis was over.

The grasshopper munched heartily, and though it wasn't much of a meal the beast perked up ready for orders.

They rode back to the edge of the clearing. Vincent took in the situation as revealed under the shafts of the rising sun, keeping himself well in the shadows.

One lone monster spider was in command of the two servant grasshoppers. It chirped and chattered in a way that argued it had no particular feelings one way or the other for its dead compatriots. After the two grasshoppers bundled off a load of the corpses, the monster crossed the river to the clearing and went directly toward the spot where, in Vincent's opinion, Penzi had last been seen. There it stopped, scratched at the earth.

"Get ready, Grundy!" Vincent muttered.

AS Vincent charged in toward the monster, it turned and saw him. Then with almost lightning action it threw a trapdoor up from the ground and started into the hole.

The trapdoor gave a wobbling motion that caught the monster unaware, and in the next second Vincent plunged his spear into the hideous black body.

"That's one more, Grundy," Vincent smiled through clenched teeth. "Now stay right here. I'm going to—"

The echo of something the scientist had told him gave him a choking, sickening sensation. But he would go through with it.

He jerked the spear out of the crusty shell of the monster that had turned dead half-way through the trapdoor. He climbed cautiously down through the opening. He knew that ordinarily there was only one spider to a hole, but he was trying to watch everything.

Clinging to the web-spun wall he peered down. He could see the whole cavern to the lower end. It was empty—almost.

There was one little four-inch patch of blue velvet at the bottom!

That piece of goods had been torn—carefully torn from Penzi's dress! It was a deliberate message!

In five minutes of careful investigating, Vincent found the other signs that Penzi had left for him. In the wall she had scraped the web away to a patch of fresh earth and there she had drawn an arrow.

It pointed up.

Of course she would go *up!* That was the only way out. But that finger mark in the damp clay meant more. It was the direction by which she would try to escape. Climbing up to the opening, Vincent caught a landmark to the north—that was the way Grundy had been taking him during those minutes of salt famine!

Vincent clambered past the lid—a heavy thing. It must have taken almost superhuman strength for Penzi to struggle through—or was she carried through? There was a tinge of dark red against a rough edge, and a slight dripping of dried blood at the nearby wall of web.

"On, Grundy! Faster! Faster!" They were headed north again, and Vincent recognized the course of a few minutes earlier.

He took a parting glance back at the clearing. The servant grasshoppers had not returned. There was no sign of life, or of danger following. Vincent sharpened his eyes to the darkness of the forest.

"Steady now. . . . Steady . . ."

The grasshopper began to sniff. He showed no signs of becoming hard to manage. He was holding to the exact course that Vincent put him on. But his manner betrayed an interest and a curiosity that matched Vincent's own. This was a natural path they were following. It was dark and leafy and—

Vincent shuddered. The deadliness of fangs was something hard to keep out of mind. After he'd seen them in action once—and so nearly a second time that it still left him breathless to think of it—he couldn't ride through a narrow leafy path like this without thinking how easy it would be—

The grasshopper gave another sniff. It had been walking. It wanted to run. It sensed something too subtle for Vincent's senses.

"Are you running toward—or away from?" Vincent muttered. Then, "Go ahead, fellow. Whatever it is, I'll never be any nearer ready for it—"

His hand froze on his spear. He bent low, patted the beast for more speed. Something white ahead—something blue—

"Go it, fellow, go it!"

The beast ran low, almost as if it would take off into flight. That white and blue—*it was Penzi in her torn dress!—she was bound to a web beneath a tree!*

ACROSS the curve of the path Vincent could see her—and beyond he saw the other living form—a black one!

Even against the dark background of trees he *knew* that gleamy-shelled devilish-looking monster. It was Six-six-six!

The monster, a few feet beyond his white prisoner, turned this way and that, looking for the approaching footsteps. Vincent wondered—was the sound of an approaching grasshopper ever anything but a harmless sound to Six-six-six, the master of cruelty and death? Did this highly advanced spider *know*—

At the quick turn of the monster, Vincent knew that the spider knew! He could almost feel the focus of the monster's eyes upon him.

In that split second the race began. The spider bared its fangs, chose its victim—not the grasshopper, not Vincent—but Penzi!

"Faster! Faster!" Vincent slapped the beast's side as they rounded the final curve. At the same instant the monster sprang at the girl—and Vincent came on with his spear frozen hard and sure in his hand.

In Vincent's dreams he would relive that moment of his life over and over. It would waft through his mind's eye in slow motion, it would flick through at racing speed, it would stop like a suspended animation film.

It would always seem to him, as his memory would flash back to that anguished moment, that everything in his consciousness did suspend—for the next thing that was in his memory was Penzi's voice, a voice that was mostly breath, breath that was strangely warming to his face. He was cutting away the spider webs that bound her, binding her torn arm, asking her how she managed to get out of that trapdoor, asking her a dozen questions at once—

"How did I ever get *in* that trapdoor—that's what I'll never forgive myself for!" she said, half-laughing, half-crying. "I was the only one that saw it happen—the lid flew up and a monster crawled out—*right beside me*—and I almost fainted. The thing turned around and saw you men fighting and gave a jump of surprise and started back toward me. That's when I fell and the lid fell over me—and there I lay for hours wondering which would come down—you or the monster!"

"We looked everywhere for you,

Penzi . . ."

"That's what I decided. I couldn't hear you—I screamed my head off but I knew you couldn't hear me."

"But you got out—"

"Look at my hands, Ponpo!" she laughed. "I had to dig out one side from under the door. Then the lid finally tipped, and I saw I could get out, but I was almost afraid to go. I finally heard a voice—I thought it must be you, Ponpo. It sounded like you were calling—only I couldn't understand you. I crawled out and listened.

"I groped my way through the trees. The voice kept going back farther and farther in the woods. Then I got suspicious. It wasn't you—I knew it wasn't—and I began to run the other way—and then the voice came closer and closer—and just at daybreak—"

"Lie down, Penzi, you're going to faint."

"I'm all right now," the girl smiled.

"I found your messages, Penzi—the velvet and the arrow. And Grundy here showed me the way—"

The grasshopper looked up at hearing his name called. He was nibbling at the dark mass with the spear sticking up through it. He turned around and spread his wings to let them mount.

In a few moments they were clattering through the air on their way to the safe mountain camp.

"Hold on tight, Penzi!" Vincent shouted, as the wind blew against their faces. "We've got to get back to Xandibaum. He's alone now . . ."

"Alone?"

"Yes, Hunzk has disappeared, too. I'm afraid he's dead."

BUT Xandibaum wasn't alone when they got back, he was right in the middle of a one man battle, and as they flew in, they saw him surrounded by hundreds of the trapdoor monsters. Even as they watched, horror-stricken, one of them darted past a force bolt that struck down a half-dozen of its companions, and leaped on the old man's back. He went down, buried beneath the horrid bodies of his killers.

Vincent ordered Grundy down, and they landed at the base of a small cliff. There he found a small cave.

"We'll stay here," he said hopefully. "Maybe they haven't seen us, and will not find us. When night comes, we will try for the higher altitudes and see if we can't stick it out until the time chain returns . . ."

But his hopes were vain. The spiders *had* seen them, and they came swarming up the canyon now.

Penzi saw them coming.

"It is the end, my Vincent," she said simply, a brave smile on her white face. "We will not leave this cave."

Vincent said nothing, because there was nothing to say. But he took his spears from Grundy's back, and slapped the faithful animal's flank.

"Go, Grundy," he said. "No need for you to die."

Then he pulled Penzi into the small cave and began piling rocks before the entrance. Before the oncoming spiders had climbed to the cliff base, he had the opening sealed, except for several places where he could thrust out his spear, to keep off any spiders who tried to tear down the barrier.

"They won't get us soon," he said grimly.

Penzi kissed him, and bravely she took up a spear and took her place beside him. "We will kill a lot of them," she said.

Something went through Vincent in that moment, and he wished mightily that he didn't have to die. What he was about to lose was too great . . .

Outside, the first of the spiders arrived. They began to tear at the barrier. Vincent jabbed with his spear. A spider went limp, flopped back. His companions dragged him away, took his place. Vincent jabbed again and again, and always it was the same. More spiders took the dead one's place.

Penzi stabbed, too, and she got her share of the trapdoor monsters. But Vincent could see that the grim business was getting to be too much for her. She was getting deathly pale and her eyes held a haunted look.

He pulled her away from the barrier, took her tenderly in his arms, and kissed her. Then he made her sit down at the back of the tiny cave, and went back to his defense work.

Once a spear was torn from his grasp. Another time a blow at the other end slammed him against the stone wall, and his arm and shoulder dripped blood. Finally he had only two spears left.

Then, at last, dark descended, and the attack ceased. It got chilly in the cave, and Vincent knew it must be colder out-

side. He turned to Penzi.

"They have gone for the night. The cold is too much for them."

He lay down beside her and took her in his arms. She snuggled in the warmth of his arms, and after awhile she went to sleep. Vincent looked down at her and kissed her tenderly.

He didn't mean to go to sleep. He intended to remain awake on guard. But he didn't. And so it was that when he awoke, it was to the echoes of a ringing scream of terror in his very ear.

HE leaped to his feet. It had been Penzi who screamed. It was bright daylight, and outside the sun streamed through a gap in the barrier of rocks. And through that gap was coming the horrid body of a trapdoor spider.

Vincent leaped forward with a shout, snatched up one of his last two remaining spears and stuck it into the spider's body. The spider screeched in agony, stiffened, jerked back, and rolled down the slope outside stone dead. It carried Vincent's spear with it.

Grimly Vincent took up his last spear and stood squarely in the gap the spiders had made. He wielded the weapon until his arms were weary, and the ring of bodies around him was shoulder high.

Then, finally, the poison of its tip seemed gone. When he prodded the spider, the insect did not die. Instead it screamed insanely and lunged forward again, even more ferociously.

Vincent knew this was the end. And he faced it. But suddenly the spider stiffened, fell. From its back protruded a spear. And outside there was a great yelling and screaming. And in the cave opening there was a familiar figure.

"Hunzk!" yelled Vincent. "Hunzk! You're alive!"

Hunzk leaped into the cave, his face wreathed in smiles; smiles that struggled through obvious pain. He was severely bitten by spiders. "Yes," he said. "I am alive. But soon there will be no live spiders in this world. I have brought an ape army, with poison spears. Already we have killed over a thousand . . ."

He pitched forward on his face.

SEVERAL hours later Vincent and Penzi knew the whole truth. But it wasn't in a happy way they learned it. Because they got it from the stiffening lips of a dying Hunzk.

The main battle was over, and all through the countryside trapdoor spiders were being hunted down and dug out by vengeful apes, now at last given the weapons that made them powerful enemies to the spiders. Unlike the tiger, the ape was powerful on the ground *and* in the trees, and it was death to the unwary spider who ventured beneath a tree.

Hunzk had gone into the forest, found the ape chief, and talked to him in the tongue which was their common root language, Cro-Magnon and anthropoid ape. He had easily enlisted their services, for life had been constant flight and death for them while the spiders ruled.

So, he had come out of the forest with an army of apes, armed with poisoned spears. And he had arrived in time to rescue Vincent and Penzi.

Now he called the ape chief to him.

"Guide them," he told Vincent and Penzi. "Give them the push that will make them the human beings of 1941, your own world. From this day on, and I speak the words of the ape chief also, you are sister and brother, kin of the same family, honored by each other. Mingle, and teach and learn from each other, for the destiny of man lies in your hands and in the apes'."

And Hunzk lay back, in his glazing eyes the brightness of a dream—a Cro-Magnon's dream of a great civilization that *might* have been, had it not been for the trapdoor monsters. But somehow it was a dream realized. And perhaps, in that moment, he foresaw in Vincent and Penzi a legend that would ring down through the twentieth century—a legend that he had never known, because it was out of his future.

But as Hunzk died, Vincent turned to Penzi, wonder in his eyes. It was still there when he took her in his arms. And it became a strange joy to him, days later, when the ape chief led them to a warm country, where life was easy, and the whole land was a beautiful garden where the apes might one day become men.

fantastic

PHINEAS TAYLOR BARNUM,

HISTORY'S GREATEST **SHOWMAN** and PERPETRATOR OF **HOAXES** BECAME SUCCESSFUL IN HIS EARLY TWENTIES THROUGH HIS YANKEE TRAIT OF CREDIBLE SHOWMANSHIP COUPLED WITH FALSE-SCIENTIFIC LANGUAGE . . .

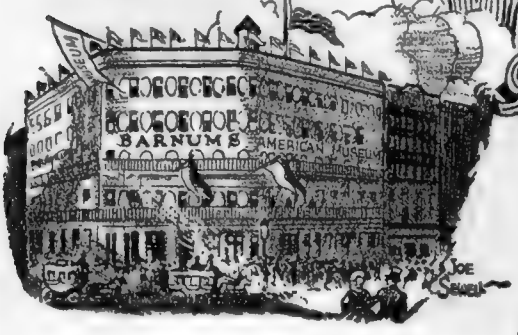
HIS FAVORITE EPIGRAM

The "FEJEE" MERMAID

WAS A STRANGE, SHRIVELED THING WITH **MONKEY'S HEAD** AND **ARMS** AND A **FISH-TAIL.** THE BODY WAS COVERED WITH HAIR UNDER WHICH SCALES WERE VISIBLE .

ZIP- the WHAT-IS-IT.

BARNUM CLAIMED TO HAVE PURCHASED **ZIP** FROM A SAILOR. AFTER HIS DEATH HE WAS PROVED TO BE A **DEFORMED NEGRO** WITH A PRIMITIVE SKULL CLAD IN A TIGHT FITTING SUIT OF FUR . .



In 1841 **BARNUM** TOOK OVER THE AMERICAN MUSEUM TO EXHIBIT HIS **HOAXES.** WITHIN A YEAR HE MADE **BARNUM'S AMERICAN MUSEUM** NEW YORK'S MOST POPULAR PLACE OF AMUSEMENT.

Hoaxes

By Julius Schwartz

PHINEAS TAYLOR BARNUM, history's greatest showman and one of the quaintest and most engaging liars who ever fooled a trusting public, dedicated his long and brilliant life to proving his favorite epigram:

"There's a sucker born every minute."

His shows ranged all the way from simple freak exhibitions to elaborate theatricals and the concert tour of Jenny Lind; and his undeniable scientific knowledge and ingenuity impelled him to offer a number of frauds that drove both scholars and laymen into baffled argument.

At least two of these—Barnum's "Feejee Mermaid" and "Zip, the What-Is-It"—deserve inclusion in this gallery of hoaxes.

P. T. Barnum, bred in the shrewd Yankee tradition of Connecticut, became a showman while he was still in his twenties. In 1835 he exhibited a venerable Negro slave woman, who looked every day of the 161 years he claimed for her. A yellowed bill of sale was shown to prove that she had once been the nurse of George Washington.

Barnum took in enough admission fees to start a larger show. In 1841, he took over the American Museum in New York. A year later, he was exhibiting the much-discussed mermaid.

It was a strange shriveled thing, this deceased mermaid, with a monkey's head, and arms above and a fish-tail below. A naturalist examined it and could find no evidence of juncture or other artificial combining of two animals.

"But I don't believe in mermaids," the naturalist insisted.

Barnum made the weird mummy the feature of his show, advertised it extensively, and for more telling effect flanked it with such bona-fide anomalies of nature as the Duckbill Platypus and the flying fish.

A bogus "doctor" lectured, telling an extravagant tale of how the creature was netted off the Fiji coast. His speech, written by Barnum, was full of garbled scientic terms; but in one or two places it sounds like the then unpublished theories of Darwin concerning adaptation. When a world traveler protested that he had never heard of a mermaid in Fiji, Barnum neatly retorted that there was no accounting for ignorance.

Barnum was vague about the origin of his phenomenal discovery, but it seems fairly certain that a clever Japanese fisherman had made it with his own two hands, early in the nineteenth century. The fake monkey-fish deceived even the wide-awake countrymen of its maker, who bought pictures of it for luck

Later it was sold to Dutch traders on the island of Batavia, thence drifted to India, where it was bought by a Yankee sea-captain. During four weeks that it was shown in New York, Barnum's museum more than doubled its receipts, and it was fully as successful when sent on tour.

Very cleverly put together, under close examination the "mermaid" proved a resounding dud. There was no actual junction between its monkey head and its fishlike body. For another thing, although animal hair "grew" out of the shoulders, a microscope revealed fish scales beneath the hair.

The face was a horrid caricature, a sure-fire baby scarer; the monstrosity was only three feet in length, dessicated, blackish. Distorted were hands on grotesquely misshapen arms; while the mouth, to say the least, was a humdinger.

Wide open, it revealed rows of leering teeth; and the weird aspect of the face was if anything enhanced by the expression on the "features," which seemed to indicate that the incredible thing had breathed its last in considerable pain.

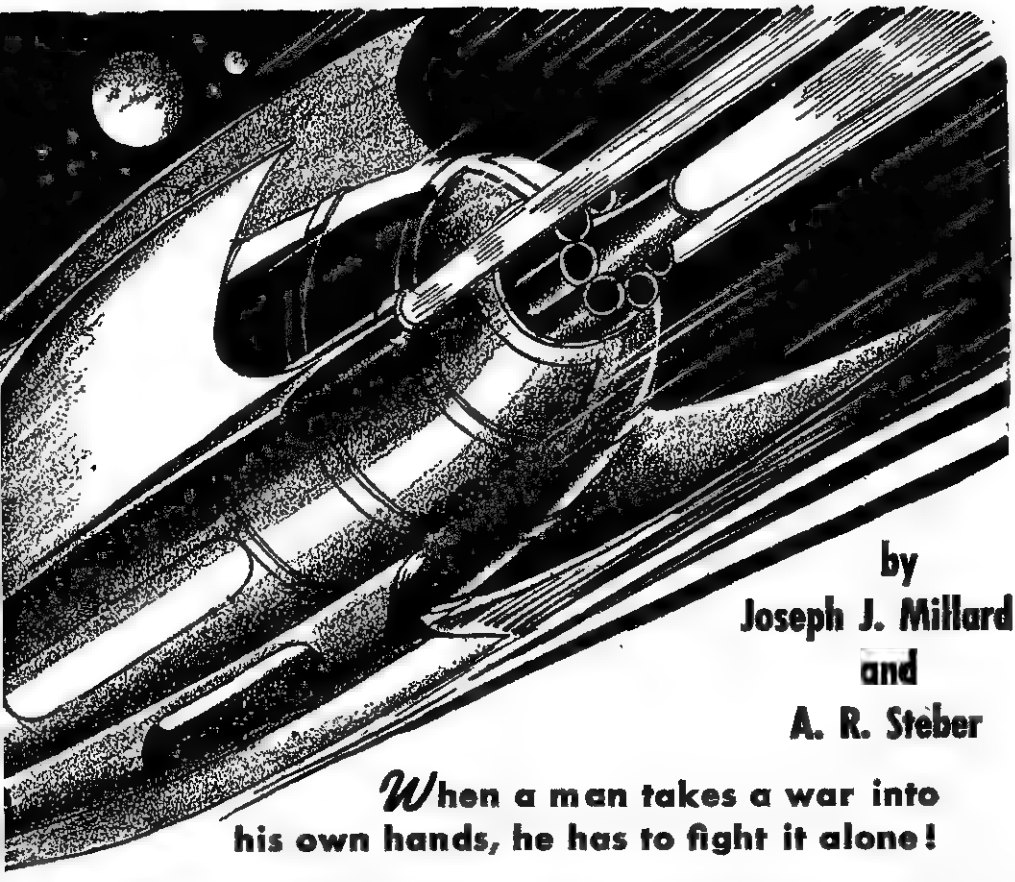
More recent, and probably remembered by many readers, was Barnum's so-called Man-Monkey, or "Zip, the What-Is-It." The showman said that he had bought Zip from a foreign sailor, who could not tell the monster's species or origin. As exhibited in Barnum's museum, and later with his circus, Zip appeared in a cage as a grotesquely manlike figure covered with thick, coarse hair, the skull and face apish. He stood erect and muttered human words.

In 1860, he had the distinction of performing before the then Prince of Wales, and he lived to a ripe old age. For more than a half a century Barnum and his successors foisted Zip upon the public, and sometimes on scientists, as a true "Missing Link," a survival of the prehistoric apeman.

But when Zip died 15 years ago, he was given a conventional human funeral. Lying in his coffin, he proved to be a deformed Negro with a primitive type of skull. The rest had been a tight-fitting suit of fur, and theatrical makeup.

Barnum's scientific deceptions, like most of his exhibits, were not in themselves intricate or even graceful. But his Yankee trait of plausible showmanship, his glib use of pseudo-scientific language, his crafty playing of rival scholars against each other for the sake of publicity, made both the exhibits and himself interesting and baffling throughout the civilized world.

Larry Buford depressed the trigger and the ray leaped out—to blast hell itself loose!



by
Joseph J. Millard
and
A. R. Steber

When a man takes a war into his own hands, he has to fight it alone!

"DRUNK? S-shure I'm drunk. Thash why I can shay things, and get away with it. F'rinstance, about how Envoy Wolsak ish making pretty good time with the girl you're gonna marry in the morning . . ." The man who reeled before the punch bowl was dressed in the uniform of the Space Guard Service. "But ish your party, y'know, and lesh have 'nother drink . . . on Larry Buford, the besh scrapper in the Shervish—"

But Larry Buford wasn't listening. He was striding out toward the gaiety of the lawn party being held to celebrate his coming marriage to Diane Bryan, daughter of old Dunstan Bryan, whose scientific genius headed the Department of Earth Defense Research. He was grim lipped, and there was a deepening frown on his face as he reached the scene, lit by swaying colored lanterns, made glamorous with diaphanous evening gowns mingled with the bright dress uniforms of the Space Guard.

For this evening, everyone present had forgotten the cares of life in 1987, forgotten the lowering clouds that threatened an early downpour, forgotten even the grim interplanetary war that threatened to drench the space lanes with blood.

A dozen couples had gathered together to celebrate the marriage of two childhood sweethearts. It was to be a military wedding, in the old traditions of the Service.

Larry Buford didn't see Diane's familiar form among the group who laughed and sang on the grassy lawn as he strode up to them. He gripped the arm of one, a guardsman.

"Where's Diane?" he asked, trying to make his voice sound casual.

The man whose arm he had grasped pointed toward a garden bench beneath a clump of trellised arbutus.

"Over there," he said. "Talking over the European political situation."

Buford's lips tightened.

"Thanks," he muttered.

Arvin Wolsak was the European Envoy, and a friend of Diane's family, which was why he was present at what otherwise should have been strictly a Guard affair. Not many Americans liked Wolsak, but

Diane seemed to think he was interesting. He was handsome—devilishly so—but somehow, Larry Buford felt a rising surge of resentment and even hate of his smooth, cultured, European manners, his insidious politeness, his almost feline assuredness.

"Diane," said Buford, the word sharp on his lips in spite of himself, as he stood before the couple. Diane was seated, and Wolsak had one of her hands in his.

She withdrew it now and rose to her feet. Her deep auburn hair was almost black in the lantern light, framing her lovely face in startling contrast to its whiteness. Her lips were brilliant carmine, and her cheeks delicately pink, harmonizing with the green of her eyes in a delightfully dangerous manner.

"Larry," she said, taking his arms in her hands and kissing him. "I'm glad you've come. I wanted you to . . ."

OUT of the night sky came a sudden strange rumbling. It grew in volume, until suddenly it became a heavy roar. Across the estate flashed a trail of flame, and the air was filled with the *whoosh* of a passing space ship.

"What the hell!" exclaimed Buford. "He's breaking all the regulations. The Spaceport's fifty miles north. Either he's lost, or . . ."

Several of the Guardsmen came running up, shouting. Wolsak stood silently by, gazing peculiarly at Diane. There was something odd about his eyes. They seemed too wide, too staring. They were his only unhandsome feature.

"That Martian's out of order," said the Guardsman whom Buford had accosted a moment before. "Looks like an arrest is on our ticket for tomorrow morning. I got his number. . . . How about it, Lieutenant?"

Larry Buford stared at the night sky, dark once more, except for the faintly luminous trail of the rocket-gases gradually dissipating into the atmosphere. He shrugged.

"Tomorrow's my wedding day," he said. "And I'll be hanged if I file a complaint. Let him go. But look up his number when you get time, and find out who he was. We'll notify him of the violation and give him a warning."

He turned back to Diane.

"What was it you wanted me to do, honey?" he asked.

She clasped her hands about her shoulders and shivered a trifle.

"I was just going to ask you to get my wrap. It's getting a little cold out here."

Buford hesitated a second as Wolsak lit a cigarette, and then as the man sauntered away toward the fountain, he nodded.

"Okay, sweet. I'll be back in a jiffy."

He turned and walked back toward the house. He met the tipsy Guardsman at the portico.

"Shay, Larry, I'm shorry about that remark . . I'm a little too drunk. I didn't mean any harm, and I didn't mean you should sock him *that* hard—washn't that big noise I heard jush now jus' a little drashtic . . .?"

Larry Buford grinned suddenly and clapped the Guardsman on the back.

"Forget it, Jim, nothing happened. That noise you heard was a space ship breaking regulations."

He strode on into the house. Behind him Jim was muttering to himself.

"Spash ship . . . thash funny. No right to be flying over thish way. . . ."

Buford frowned a bit as he searched for Diane's wrap. It *was* funny. He could think of no reason for it, nor any possible excuse for such an unusual deviation from landing regulations—because obviously that ship couldn't be landing fifty miles north, when it was heading west. Certainly would have to be looked up when he got back into harness. . . .

He found the wrap and began to retrace his steps. Suddenly, outside he heard a shrill scream, a feminine scream, and it sounded like Diane. In rapid succession there were a series of scattered shots, then a brilliant glare that flamed through the windows like a lightning flash.

"Heat gun!" exclaimed Larry Buford in horror. "What's going on. . . ."

WITH heart hammering in strange jerkiness, and an unknown terror freezing his brain, he raced for the door. He burst from the house and plunged toward the lawn as though driven by a thousand devils.

A cloud of smoke billowed toward him and he plunged through it. In his nostrils was an acrid smell—and horribly, a nauseating smell—of burned flesh!

"God!" he choked. "Diane. . . .!"

Then he burst upon a scene that burned itself into his brain with its sheer horror.

On the scorched grass lay the charred bodies of twelve Guardsmen, his comrades, sprawled grotesquely in the agonies of a flaming death among the overturned chairs and tables.

The twelve feminine guests and Diane were gone. Nothing of them was left but the faint echo of a strangled cry—a shriek of utter despair that came from a distance, to the west side of the garden.

Buford whirled toward the source, and started to run. But he had gone barely a hundred yards before he heard the familiar rumbling of rocket blasts. Swiftly they grew to a roar, and into the sky leaped the same ship that had gone over so shortly before.

And as he stared at it, Larry Buford had no doubt that in it were the twelve kidnapped girls and his own fiancee, Diane Bryan. Why had they been taken? Who had taken them?

Then, with growling volume, drops of rain came pattering down until in a moment it became a downpour. On the lawn a hissing sound arose, and steam drifted into the air from the still burning bodies of his dead comrades.

An in the charred body of one lay the now impenetrable secret of the identity of the ruthless Martian raider, the Guardsman who had requested permission to arrest the offending space ship.

Larry Buford groaned. "Why didn't I ask him that number?" he sobbed.

One by one the garden lanterns went out, drenched by the pounding rain. In the sky the luminous trail of rocket gases vanished into nothingness.

With leaden steps Bulford stumbled back to the scene of tragedy. With bitter horror in his heart he examined each charred corpse, dressed in its uniform of the Space Guard Service. It was not for many minutess before he suddenly realized the truth. Among those bodies there was not one dressed in civilian clothes!

Arvin Wolsak, Envoy of the European Federation, was not not among those destroyed by the raider! He was not in the garden at all.

CHAPTER II

Larry Buford Disobeys Orders

"SPACE patrol cutter SP-26 calling headquarters. Emergency message. Space patrol SP-26 calling headquarters . . ."

Larry Buford hurled the words at the transceiver grill on the cutter's instrument panel without raising his head. His slitted eyes were following the crawling shadow on the screen of his cosmo-scanner, his right hand gripping the blast control lever until knuckles whitened.

The transceiver *pinged* softly for attention.

"Space fleet headquarters acknowledging. Commander Rohlein standing by for emergency message. Come through, lieutenant."

The sound of his commander's brusque, martial accents drove the red flame of rage momentarily from Larry Buford's brain. He drew a deep breath, turned his lean, ray-tanned face toward the transceiver and began his report in approved army style.

"Enemy war cruiser intersecting trajectory V-773 on the planetoid 15 belt. Running with exhaust darkened and no lights showing, but the radiation is unmistakably Martian. . . ."

"The devil!" Commander Rohlein barked. "What could a Martian war craft be doing, sneaking through the Barren Belt? There aren't any women and children to slaughter up there." Abruptly his voice sharpened.

"For that matter, what in blazes are *you* doing a hundred thousand miles beyond your patrol area? And don't tell me a space vacuole dragged you out there, either. You used that alibi last time to squirm out of a court-martial for being A. W. O. L."

"No, sir." Larry Buford hoped his voice sounded appropriately meek. "I came out here intentionally, sir. To test a theory of mine."

"What theory?"

"About that new secret weapon Mars is using. Vadis made himself Dictator of Mars and started this war of planetary conquest on the strength of those new irresistible proton shells. So far, nobody has been able to discover the source of *Protonite*. Rare as it's supposed to be, Vadis apparently has an unlimited source somewhere.

"Now, it's my theory that he's found *Protonite* at the core of one of those dead planetoids—and this practically proves it. The warship was just leaving the gravity field of Planetoid 1535 when I spotted it.

"I'd bet a gram of *Protonite* to a ton of meteoric dust that a surprise raid on 1535 would silence Vadis's most deadly weapon

and end the war practically overnight."

"Um-m-m. You might be right. At least, even the faint hope of ending this senseless slaughter is worth a scouting raid. Has the enemy discovered your presence?"

"Not yet. I'm coasting behind an asteroid, well out of range."

"Good. Then they won't know they've been spotted. Avoid detection at all costs and return to base at once. And, lieutenant . . ." the commander's voice hardened. "You have my express orders to avoid a fight. Just one more of your suicidal one-man raids on armed Martian cruisers and I'll have you court-martialed myself. I'm about fed up with your attempts to win the war single-handed. While I sympathize with your anguish, I cannot continue to condone the way you have changed."

Changed! The impact of the word etched white lines of pain around Larry Buford's tight lips, filled his gray eyes with cold flames of fury. Merciful heaven, who wouldn't change? Involuntarily, his mind went back to that hideous night, six weeks before . . .

EVERYONE had been happy that night —and the happiest of all had been Larry Buford as he had gone to the house to get Diane's wrap. He had left gayety—and returned to *death!* Diane was gone. Nothing remained but the faint echo of a strangled cry—a shriek of utter despair that would thunder in Larry Buford's brain to the end of time. The echo of a cry—and the sinister shadow of a Martian raiding cruiser slipping skyward, vanishing into the low-hanging clouds that had masked its coming.

And the next day, Envoy Wolsak's disappearance became confirmed. Buford had been unable to trace him, through either the American Government, or the European Consul. For political reasons American authorities had announced Wolsak's death by the same attack that had killed the twelve guardsmen. They had even buried one of the charred bodies as that of Arvin Wolsak. Such an error could be easily understandable, whereas a disappearance was unexplainable.

The European government had been strangely uninterested in investigating, and before Larry Buford had gone very far in his search through authoritative circles, war had been declared, and more important things supplanted his problem.

After that, there was nothing left but revenge—and Larry Buford had become a raging lone wolf of space, admired by his comrades, feared by his Martian enemies.

"Did you hear my orders, lieutenant?" Commander Rohlein's voice, ominously soft, brought his mind back to the present.

With a mighty effort, Larry Buford controlled his voice, drove back a surging, berserk fury that had driven him to a dozen suicidal attacks against Martian cruisers in the ensuing six weeks of agony.

"Yes, sir. But it's possible that the cruiser has small scouts out around it. If one of those sights me, sir, I'll be forced to fight."

As he talked, Larry Buford's hands were flying. He read the location figures on his cosmo-scanner and touched the keys of the electroputer—that marvelous electric slide rule that instantaneously translated cosmo-scanner readings into flying time.

The figures six-point-five appeared on the electroputer dial. Six and one-half seconds —the time it would take his little cutter, under full blast, to leap within striking range of the enemy. Time enough to smash the cruiser with his single ray gun before the unsuspecting crew even realized his presence. Time enough to sate his murderous fury with one more blow of vengeance against the Martian raiders. Before the all-consuming hatred that gripped him, nothing else, not even his duty, mattered.

Very deliberately he bent forward and drove his clenched fist against the transceiver grill. At headquarters, the blow would sound like the explosion of an atomic shell.

At the same instant, he shouted: "Commander! A scout—I'm being attack . . ." He snapped off the power switch in mid-sentence.

"Sorry, commander," he murmured, a tight, humorless smile touching his thinned lips. "This is my own private fight."

His fingers raced over the control buttons, swinging the cutter to line on the distant cruiser, setting the ray gun for automatic firing in six and one-half seconds. Then he braced himself in the cushioned seat and jerked the blast control lever to full power.

The agonizing thunder of terrible acceleration smashed against him. Unbearable pressure drove the air from his lungs, hurled a curtain of merciful blackness across his brain. He was unconscious

when the cutter, whipping at better than a hundred and fifty thousand miles an hour, came within range of the darkened cruiser. He was still unconscious when the ray gun in the cutter's nose began to *chug*, sending its annihilating bolts across space into the black hull of the warcraft.

HIS mind, hardened to terrific accelerations by his years as a Space Guard, was already clearing when the ray gun fired its last bolt and the robot controls whipped the cutter away in a flaming curve. He snapped to the cosmo-scanner and spun its dials, bringing the image of the war cruiser into focus on the plate. His lips thinned.

The scanner showed the enemy craft drifting helplessly, its entire stern, including all rocket tubes, completely shot away. But the fore part of the ship was intact. The pilot must have spotted Buford's rocket blast in time to cram on full power in an effort to escape. The increased speed of the cruiser had made the ray gun miss its target amidships and concentrated all blasts on the stern.

Larry Buford cursed aloud and swung the cutter back toward the helpless craft. He could let it go, to drift for eternity among the asteroids in the Barren Belt of space. But there were living beings in the undamaged bow of the cruiser. With all his hatred of Martians, Larry Buford could not make himself condemn men to such a fate.

Rescue was impossible. The only alternative was to return and blast the bow of the cruiser to oblivion. The quick, merciful death of bursting atomic rays was a kindness compared to the slow agonies of starvation in space.

Moving like an automaton, Buford set the controls and lined his ray gun on the drifting craft. Wooden-faced, he watched the wrecked cruiser grow on his scanner plate until scant miles separated them. His fingers closed over the manual trip on the ray gun. He was near enough now so that a single shot would ensure instant annihilation.

Then it happened!

Even as his fingers closed on the trip lever, green flame winked from the bow of the wrecked cruiser. The desperate crew had unlimbered a heavier gun.

Buford saw his own ray strike, saw the remaining hull detonate into shapeless bits under the terrific force of the atomic explosion.

But at the same instant, the cutter met the outer fringe of the Martian's devastation ray. The thunder of the rockets was suddenly drowned in the greater thunder of unleashed energy as billions of radioactive atoms exploded. Like a feather in a storm, the tiny cutter whipped up and away from the blast, spinning end over end, plates groaning and buckling, rockets smashed to silence.

Inside the tiny cabin, Larry Buford fought to shield his head as the mad gyrations of the stricken craft hurled him from wall to wall with stunning force. But even in the midst of the chaos, he had time to be thankful that he had struck only the outer edge of the ray, that the Martian gunners had been too rushed for careful aim. Only that fact had saved him from instant and total destruction.

Slowly the wild movements of the ship straightened to level flight as remnants of the gravity controls took hold.

Larry lifted his aching body from the floor and inspected the damage. The cosmo-scanner still functioned though the Martian wreck had vanished, millions of miles astern. Most of the other instruments were wrecked and the soft hiss of escaping air warned him that the sturdy hull had given way under the terrific fury of the blast.

Laboriously he climbed into a space suit. He would need its portable oxygen tank soon when the remaining air leaked from the wrecked cabin. Then he returned to the rocket motors.

A single glance told him the terrible truth. The entire motor assembly, including rocket tubes, firing mechanism and fuel supplies, had been torn away. Not even an auxiliary power unit remained.

He sat down suddenly on the smashed pilot seat while the full horror of his predicament seeped into his numbed mind. He was trapped in space. Like the Martian cruiser after his first attack, he was drifting helplessly, doomed to whirl through eternity in a duranium-steel tomb among the debris of space.

CHAPTER III

Planetoid 1535

THERE was neither night nor day in the endless void of space, but Larry

Buford's radiochron marked the passage of four Earthdays without event. He slept much, ate sparingly of the cutter's food supply, and regularly, every eight hours, replaced the exhausted oxygen cylinder in his space suit with a fresh one from the dwindling store.

Because he knew the mechanics of Space Patrol organization, he could visualize the progress of the raiding party being assembled, on the strength of his discovery, for an assault on Planetoid 1535. He knew that it would take three days to assemble the fleet and a week to flash across the void from Earth. Six days from now, if he were still alive, he could begin to wonder whether or not the raid was successful, whether Vadis of Mars had been shorn of his deadliest weapon.

In all the hopelessness of his predicament, there was one faint ray of hope. The combined impetus of the cutter's own attack speed and the power of the explosion that had wrecked it had sent the little craft flashing back through space in the general direction of Planetoid 1535. There was a faint hope that he might somehow drift into the path of the Earth fleet.

But it was a forlorn hope considering the endless quintillions of miles of space and the fact that the cutter could easily be passed by as just another dark asteroid.

Larry Buford's mind dwelt lognest on the possible fate of Diane Bryan in the hands of the Martians. But the capture of Wolsak still puzzled him. The Tigermen of Mars made frequent raids on earth and always their procedure was the same—*death* to the men and *captivity* for the women. Rumors filtering back to Earth concerning the fate of those captives made Buford clench his fists in helpless agony while he prayed that death might somehow have reached Diane quickly. Death was infintely preferable to the attentions of the Tigermen.

But why the capture of Wolsak—if it *was* capture?

He felt the pull on the morning of the fifth day of drifting. For the thousandth time his helpless gaze had drifted to the motionless instruments on the cutter's panel. But this time there was a difference.

Scarce believing, Buford's eyes staring eyes saw the flicker of movement on the gravicorder dial. Somewhere close by a large body was exerting a faint pull of gravity on the drifting cutter. With a cry of hope, he moved his ponderous space-suited bulk to the cosmo-scanner and began to move the sweep knob.

Almost instantly the purple plate filled with the dark shape of a planetoid. Sharpening the focus brought identifying details into view—the upflung ring of a meteoric crater, the smaller cluster of *Lunalite* streams near the southern pole.

"Planetoid 1535!" Larry Buford cried aloud, the words booming hollowly in his space helmet.

By some unbelievable quirk of fate, the wrecked cutter had been hurled back into the gravity field of the very planetoid from which the Martian had come, the planetoid that would soon know the destroying thunder of Earth's artillery. If the pull of gravity was not too strong, allowing the helpless cutter to land without too great an impact, he might still live to contact his comrades.

The next hours were tense ones. The space-speed indicator had been smashed, making it impossible to even estimate the rate of the cutter's fall. Judging from the size and probable mass of the planetoid, however, he might reasonably expect to land with a pretty hard crash but with a fair chance of survival.

He spent the last half hour ripping padding from the cutter's walls and wrapping it around the vital parts of his space suit. Even if he survived the crash landing, any rents in the suit or failure of the oxygen tank would mean quick death, for Planetoid 1535's thin atmosphere was known to be almost entirely without oxygen.

THE landing was much easier than he had anticipated. Almost gently, the wrecked cutter plowed into the chalky surface of the planetoid, rebounded a thousand feet from the impact, then settled to rest in billowing clouds of metallic dust.

Bruised and shaken but otherwise unhurt, Larry Buford clambered to his feet, waited for the dust to settle before he wrenched open the sealed door. He tried to make his first step gentle, but his muscles, attuned to the normal gravity maintained in the cutter, flexed too hard and sent his body tumbling skyward. He swore at his own clumsiness, but used the advantage of his height to survey the terrain of Planetoid 1535.

Everywhere he looked was barren desolation, the endless peaks and gullies and

meteor pits unrelieved by any sign of life. It was not until he happened to glance almost directly below that he saw the circle.

It was a huge, perfectly round disc some five hundred feet in diameter, slightly darker but otherwise no different in appearance from the rest of the planetoid's surface. It looked almost as though a giant brush had painted this darker circle against the terrain. There were no signs of life, nothing within the circle except a single jumbled mass of meteoric rock similar to those masses that dotted the whole surface of 1535.

Buford landed from his drifting leap almost on the edge of the darker patch. He advanced cautiously, aware of a strange tingling thrill of danger that touched his nerves with warning. Yet there seemed to be no menace in the innocent patch of darker soil. Curiosity finally overcame caution. He took another leaping step, directly over the edge of the mysterious circle.

It was then the property of the darker circle became apparent with almost devastating suddenness.

Buford's leap had carried him a good twenty feet into the air. His body drifted weightlessly forward, crossed the boundary of the dark patch . . . and plummeted to the ground with a stunning impact. Even before the dust settled from his fall, Larry Buford knew what the dark circle really was—an immense gravity plate set into the ground and thinly covered with a layer of metallic dust. Beings from another world, a world of much stronger gravitational pull than the tiny Planetoid 1535, had set out this plate to enable them to move about normally. And those beings could only be. . . .

Realization made Larry Buford slash at the rocket pistol slung from his belt. But before he could free the weapon, the grotesque space-suited figure of a Martian Tigerman strode through the dust clouds to cover him with the gaping muzzle of a drum-gun.

Cursing but helpless under the threat of the gun, Buford let himself be herded out of the dust toward the pile of meteorite. With no surprise, now, he saw that the metallic rock was a sham, a camouflage moulded over a small air-tight army cabin. He might have known that if Planetoid 1535 was so important to Vadis, the Dictator of Mars, there would be innumerable sentry posts hidden around the globe.

Watched at every moment by the Tigerman's greenish, glowing eyes with their queer, vertical pupils, the Earthman went through the airlock into the cabin and began to remove his space suit.

He saw that this was like other Martian outposts, a small prefabricated metal cabin of two rooms. One room contained living quarters for the sentry. The other, larger room in which Buford and his captor were discarding their space suits, was almost filled by a maze of intricate electrical apparatus. Around the walls were maps, charts and technical diagrams.

"So nice of you Earthman," the Tigerman growled in guttural Martian, "to fall so near my gravity plate. It saved me the boring task of bounding after you out in the lighter gravity area."

HE stroked his thick, feline whiskers with a furry, clawed hand and bared sharp teeth in a mocking grin. His sardonic gaze took in the details of the Earthman's tight-fitting Space Guard uniform revealed when he discarded the bulky space suit.

"Put down that gun for five minutes," Buford promised grimly, "and I'll save you the boring task of going on living, *you mouse-eater.*"

The Martian went livid at the deadly insult. Then with an effort he controlled his rage and bared sharp teeth in a mocking sneer.

"Our Great Master has already demonstrated that you Earthlings talk more forcefully than you fight," he spat. He gestured menacingly with the gun. "But you must be tired after your flight, *pupo.** Get back into that corner and I'll give you a chance to rest."

Raging but helpless, Larry Buford backed away from the gun muzzle until the steel wall touched his back. The Tigerman leered as his paw closed a switch beside him. Instantly a sharp whine poured from slits in the wall beside the Earthman.

A stabbing, flaming agony swept through his body, locking every muscle in a numbing paralysis. The humming stopped but Larry Buford found himself utterly unable to move even a finger, though his mind was clear and his eyes could turn to follow his captor's movements.

"Rest, my friend," mocked the Tiger-

* (*Pupo* is a Martian worm, the lowest form of animal life on the planet.)—Ed.

man, "and dream of what you would do if you were free. The ray will hold you long enough for me to 'vise a report of your capture to headquarters."

He turned to a huge televisor set and snapped on a power switch. Larry's gaze went from the instrument to the big charts on the wall. His glance roved over them, seeking some key information that he might later use if an opportunity of escape presented itself. There were maps: the twin hemispheres of Planetoid 1535 dotted with red circles; charts of the thin air envelope of the globe crossed and recrossed by odd fan-shaped figures; diagrams of unfamiliar machinery and strange weapons. Gradually the full meaning of what he was reading burned into Larry Buford's brain with a numbing horror. These were not only the weapons of defense, but of complete and terrible offense! He was gazing at the details of a death trap—a death trap into which he himself was unwittingly luring the space ships of his own Space Guard comrades.

In that instant the whole diabolical plan became clear. The entire surface of Planetoid 1535 was dotted with these concealed detector stations, guarding every avenue of approach to the vital *Protonite* mines near the north pole. Every hour of the day or night, invisible detectors at each station swept an arc of the atmosphere above, ready to instantly signal the intrusion of any space ship. But worst of all, at the discovery of an attacking fleet, these same stations held the machinery to fill the space above them with an invisible radiation that would instantly destroy every living thing.

It was a death trap. And Larry Buford, in telling Commander Rohlein of his discovery, had unwittingly started the chain of activities that would send the unsuspecting space fleet down into that trap—and complete annihilation.

In his agony, Larry Buford was only vaguely aware that the televisor screen bore the image of a cold-eyed Tigerman in a commander's uniform, or that the image was eyeing him murderously as it snarled:

"Very well done, Fi-than. Since he landed by accident, we can be fairly certain he transmitted no alarm to his fleet. You may 'examine' him for information as you see fit. If he still lives after your examination, disintegrate him at once. You will be properly rewarded, Fi-than."

The image faded. The hum of the televisor died away. The Tigerman turned to his captive, licking his lips with a long catlike tongue, flexing his sharp, feline claws in anticipation.

CHAPTER IV

An Unexpected Visitor

"HOW about it, Earthman?" the Tigerman spat. "Are the effects of the ray wearing off yet, or does it hold Earth muscles as long as it does Martian?"

He deliberately dug sharp claws deep into Larry's arm. For a moment there was no feeling. Then suddenly, the first stabs of agony from the wounds tortured the Space Guard's nerves. The feeling gave him a thrill of hope. Apparently Earth muscles *could* throw off the paralysis more quickly, for the pain was a sign of retreating numbness. He controlled an impulse to jerk the tortured arm.

"Good," the Martian withdrew his claws, dripping crimson blood. "You'll be safe another fifteen minutes while I take my hourly readings. Then we'll play a little, you and I, until you are ready to tell me all about the Space Guards and their latest battle plans."

He turned away, licking his lips over the anticipation of torture, and went at the recording of dial readings from the big panel. The moment his back was turned, Buford began a desperate struggle to free his muscles from the paralysis. Slowly he forced circulation into the numbed parts until he could move fingers, hands, and finally, his arms. When, after ten minutes of silent agony he felt looseness in every muscle, he knew that he was completely free. But he remained rigid and expressionless, biding his time until his captor came within reach.

The Tigerman finished his task and turned.

"Are you ready for our little game, *pupo*?"

He started toward Buford's tense figure. Half-way across the cabin he stopped, turned aside and picked up the deadly drum-gun.

"Just in case you have recovered too soon, my friend," he spat.

Larry Buford's heart sank as the Martian stepped close, ramming the flaring muzzle into his middle. The drumming death would utterly destroy him the moment he

made a move. And he had to stay alive now, to find some way of warning his Space Guard comrades of the trap.

Without any warning, the Martian abruptly lifted a copper-shod foot and kicked Buford viciously in the groin. The unexpected shock of agony was too much for even the Space Guard's iron control. With a gasp of pain, he winced away from the blow.

"Ha! I thought so," the Tigerman snarled, leaping back with the drum-gun levelled. "Enough of this shamming. A claw deep in each eye should show you who is master."

With the drum-gun ready in one paw, he came forward again, huge claws bared for a sweep at Larry Buford's unprotected face. Sweat beaded the Earthman's forehead. To stand still meant blindness; to move meant the agony of drumming death. The eager claw, upraised, started downward. . . .

From across the cabin, a gong clanged sharply. A red radiolight bulb on the panel began to wink on and off.

"The signal!" the Tigerman cried. "Someone is entering the detector zone!"

Instinctively he swung toward the alarm device. And in that instant of inattention, Larry Buford hurled himself forward in a flying leap.

HIS arms closed around the bestial body, hurling the screaming, spitting Tigerman forward with the impact of his drive. A deadly claw opened lanes of agony down his back. Over his head the drum-gun spoke, the whole cabin quivering to the *thumm-thumm-thumm* as bolt after bolt of short-range energy blasted the air. Buford released his grip on the snarling figure, caught hold of the drum-gun barrel and wrenched, oblivious of the searing heat of the discharges.

The two figures rolled over and over across the floor, swearing, clawing, snarling, spitting. Overhead, the detector still clanged in warning of the approach of a space craft that might contain either friend or foe.

With a terrific effort, Buford wrenched the drum-gun from the Martian's paw but his own muscles, weakened by the slashing claws, were incapable of retaining their grip. The gun went skidding across the floor out of reach. The Earthman gathered himself, dug his head into the Tigerman's chest to protect his face from the slashing claws and drove both clenched fists upward blindly, putting every ounce of power into the blows.

The Tigerman started a scream that ended abruptly. Buford felt thin, feline bones crush against his knuckles and his adversary went limp. Buford rolled free and struggled to his feet. The Martian was unconscious and would, judging from his appearance, remain so for a long time.

Although blood was still pouring from Buford's slashed arms and back, there was no time for first aid. He leaped to the detector, swept the intricate knobs and dials with a practiced eye. A visiplate, similar in general makeup to the cosmo-scanner on his patrol cutter, was built into the detector panel. Buford snapped switches until the panel glowed to life. Then he focused the descending space ship on the plate and bent over it.

His breath caught. The craft that had set off the detector was a small Martian express ship of the type used for running communications by the Tiger army. It was coming down swiftly under full rocket blast but weaving erratically as though either out of control or being guided by an unpracticed hand. Although Buford was unable to fathom the calculating machines on the panel, he estimated that the approaching ship would land in about half an hour.

Half an hour—thirty Earth minutes in which to somehow get a warning through to the Earth fleet. After that, what happened to him was of little consequence.

Working swiftly, he bound and gagged the Martian and dragged his unconscious figure out of sight into the tiny bedroom. Then, hastily binding his own wounds and squeezing into one of the Tigerman's spare uniforms, he raced back to the control room. In his precious remaining minutes before the enemy craft landed, he had to locate a transmitter and hurl his warning message across space to the approaching Earth fleet.

Using his command of the Martian language and his knowledge of physics, Buford attacked the wall charts with optimistic enthusiasm. Twenty minutes later he sank onto the operator's couch in black despair. It was unbelievable—yet in all that maze of instruments, there was no high-powered transmitter of any kind. The sole means of communication was the weak televisor set, only powerful enough to connect with

headquarters a hundred miles or so away.

Nor were there any controls for the huge disintegrator gun which, according to the chart, was concealed close by to sweep the sector of sky above. Apparently the operator's sole duty was to televise the appearance of enemy ships to headquarters. Actual firing was handled from there by remote control. Buford's last hope, of destroying the approaching Martian ship to postpone his own detection, was frustrated.

AN imperative buzz, louder than the incessant clangor of the alarm gong, jerked his haggard face toward the instrument board. His breath caught as he saw the televisor screen beginning to glow and to crawl with vague shadows. Martian headquarters was calling. In a moment the screen would clear and the distant Tigerman operator would be able to see straight down the television beam into the lonely outpost.

To stay in the room meant instant detection. But to hide from the all-seeing televisor screen was no better, for if the Tigerman did not appear to answer the call, an alarm would send warships racing to the outpost at once. Larry Buford was caught between two fires as the shadows on the screen congealed into focus.

His eyes fell on the Martian's padded space suit. Instantly he was clambering into its concealing folds. He dropped the bulky, face-shadowing helmet into a place a fraction of a second before the image of the Tigerman commander cleared on the televisor screen. Lifting the helmet from its seal just far enough for words to get through, Buford pointed at the flashing signal light.

"The alarm!" he bawled in imitation of the guttural Martian accents. "One of our ships—coming down out of control. I'll try to rescue survivors and report when I return."

Without giving the commander a chance to answer, he snatched up the drum-gun and plunged into the airlock.

Outside the camouflaged cabin he stopped short, squinting into the cold sunlight. The Martian ship was some four miles to the west, screaming down a sweeping curve under full rocket toward an inevitable crash.

Buford's breath caught and instinctively his feet began to carry him across the dark ground. Shooting down an enemy was one thing, but to finish off the helpless victims of a crash sickened him. He couldn't do that.

A thousand feet up the rocket flames died, but no cushioning blast came from the nose jets. Apparently either an amateur or a badly wounded pilot held the controls.

The ship struck, vanished into billowing dust and rebounded high in the air, pointing straight at the outpost. Three times more it hit and rebounded, losing momentum with every impact until it plowed to a final halt against buried rocks, almost at the edge of the gravity zone.

Buford bounded forward, tore open the battered port. Inside, two space-suited figures sprawled face down in a shambles of wrecked instruments. He knelt and rolled the nearest body over. One glance showed the Martian was beyond aid, his chest pierced by a steel slat ripped from the control panel. Oxygen, seeping from the torn suit, was bringing gouts of purplish blood. Curiously, Buford scrubbed dust from the face-plate until he could see the features of the dead Tigerman.

The sight was like a physical blow, staggering his senses. The face of Wolsak, the European envoy, stared back at him with dead eyes wide!

But that was impossible. Wolsak was an Earthman, this fellow was a Tigerman.

The truth fought its way into Buford's frozen brain. A scar on the cheekbone, patches of lighter skin where Wolsak had worn false plastic skin—a false face, Buford realized, to conceal feline features. No wonder Wolsak had been so artificially handsome. The staring eyes were cat eyes, but contact lenses with brown pupils could easily hide the telltale Tigerman's eyes. That is why Wolsak's eyes had seemed too wide, too staring.

This *was* Wolsak—not an Earthman, but a Martian spy!

Whoever the real Wolsak was, he had no doubt been killed by this unnamed Martian and his post taken over in masquerade.

Something chilling, nameless, clutched at Buford's brain—an awful presentiment, a growing suspicion that filled him with dread. He dropped the dead figure from trembling arms, turned to its companion.

He forced himself to lift the body, turn it over. His mind was a numb mass beyond the power of sensation, incapable of feeling

any more surprises. Shocked beyond any further physical emotion, he cleared the faceplate and stared through its curving glassoid *at the delicate oval face, the deep auburn hair of Diane Bryan!*

CHAPTER V

"You Are a Traitor"

IT was an eternity of dragging minutes before Diane Bryan showed signs of returning consciousness. Divested of her space suit, she lay on the operator's bench before the televisor screen, which had, fortunately remained blank. Of bringing her there, removing the suit, discovering that she was uninjured except for a bump on her head from contact with the poorly-padded helmet, Larry Buford could remember nothing.

"Diane!" he whispered, and for the tenth time found the slender thread of pulse that beat with returning strength. "Diane!"

"Larry!" Her lovely violet eyes opened wide filled with the radiant joy of recognition.

Suddenly she looked past him, saw the maze of instruments, the chart-hung walls of the outpost cabin. The light died from her eyes. She looked back, swept her gaze over Larry Buford's muscular body in the appropriated Tigerman army uniform. Her lips tightened.

"Diane!" Larry cried. "You're alive—and here! I still can't believe it. What happened to you that night? Where have you been. . . ."

"Larry!" she cried out piteously. "You . . . your uniform . . . this place . . ." A wave of horror began to spread over her face, and it grew until it engulfed her so that she shrank away from him as though he were unclean.

"So that's it," she breathed heartbrokenly. "That's why Wolsak was coming here—to meet you. Both of you are . . . in league with each other. You, Larry Buford, *a traitor!* Oh-h-h. Now I see. . . ."

Buford, his face going suddenly white, leaped forward and grasped her arms. Almost frantically he shook her.

"No Diane!" he said hoarsely. "Listen. I can explain how I. . . ."

She went on wildly, ignoring his protestations.

"I see it all now. You've turned traitor to Earth. You're helping to blast down your friends, joined the enemies of your own people. You knew that Martian ship was coming to kidnap us. You knew Wolsak was dead, and that . . ." she shuddered, ". . . that horrible Tigerman was masquerading as an Envoy and a spy for the Martians. To think that I didn't see through his disguise. To think he actually held my hand. . . ." She stopped.

Buford was almost frantic now.

"Diane! Believe me! It isn't true. I was disabled in space, landed here, and was captured. . . ."

"Captured?" The disbelief in her face was unmistakable. "You don't look like a prisoner now!"

"I turned the tables on the Tigerman who held this post—who originally captured me when I was wrecked. I've got him prisoner in this other room. . . ."

Larry Buford strode purposefully toward the door behind which the captive Li-Than lay bound.

"I'll show you. . . ."

Suddenly a signal buzzer sounded, and a red light began flickering on the control board. The televisor screen began to light up.

Buford halted in dismay. Then suddenly he pushed Diane back against the far wall.

"Stay there," he warned, "out of sight. I've got to stall off the commander. . . ."

He turned toward the televisor.

From the corner of his eye he caught a blur of swift motion.

"Stop! Or I'll shoot!"

HE spun, staring incredulously at the tiny pistol in Diane Bryan's slender hand.

"Stay back," she ordered. "If you touch those instruments, I'll shoot you . . . even you."

The room seemed to rock before his dazed eyes. He could read in her eyes that this was no idle bluff. She would shoot.

Sickening realization came to Larry Buford. With every passing moment, the great Earth fleet was drawing closer to Planetoid 1535, closer to the death trap that would blast them from the skies. And he, a lieutenant in the Space Guard, was being diverted by the girl he loved from any possible hope of warning his comrades.

"You win," he said resignedly, made as if to move back from the panel, and then

hurled himself straight across the intervening space at the girl.

The gun snarled once. Flame seared his left ribs, drove the air from his lungs. Then his left hand was closing over the hot gun, twisting it aside with a fury that brought a moan of pain to the girl's lips. She fell back from the impact of his lunge.

In that moment of action, the last regard for his own feelings left Larry Buford. He was not a man with a heart, but a soldier, facing an enemy whose success meant destruction to friends and comrades. Without a moment's hesitation, he brought up his right fist, drove it against her unprotected jaw. Without a sound, she collapsed in his arms.

Simultaneously, a sharp clicking announced the coming to life of the televisor screen. Buford froze, his mind racing over a dozen hopeless possibilities in the space of a heartbeat while the 'visor screen glowed brighter and filmy shadows began to form.

He was trapped and helpless. The space suit gag would never work again. He had read suspicion in the commander's eyes at his precipitate flight from the last contact. If he only had a powerful transmitter or an undamaged rocket ship. . . .

An idea flashed into his mind—a way to get both space ship and transmitter. The only way . . . to trick the Martians into bringing them to him.

He whirled, deposited Diane's unconscious form in the bedroom out of sight. The Tigerman was still unconscious on the floor. Buford slashed off the Martian's bonds, caught the limp body in his arms and raced back to the clearing televisor. On the way he snatched up the drum-gun. The shadows on the 'visor screen were solidifying into the familiar figure of the commander.

Directly in front of the screen, Buford embraced the unconscious Tigerman, turned him so that his back was to the 'visor. Then, closing the Martian's limp fingers over the gun, he caught hand and gun in a hard grip and began what would look, through the televisor, like a fierce life-and-death struggle between Earthman and Martian. But he was careful not to permit the Tigerman's face to turn toward the screen.

"Li-than! Li-than!" the commander's voice, trembling with rage, poured from the machine. "What is happening?"

Buford ducked his head so that the movement of his lips would not show, answered in imitation of the Tigerman's voice:

"Commander!" he gasped breathlessly. "The Earthman broke free . . . I am badly wounded . . . send help at once."

"Fool!" screamed the commander. "Your bungling may ruin the Great Project. Help comes at once. Hold out until it arrives or your life is forfeit."

The screen was empty as the raging Tigerman whirled away. Larry Buford took a deep breath and let the unconscious Martian crumple to the floor. His plan had worked so far, admirably. As long as they didn't send a whole battle fleet to overcome one Earthman, he should be able to somehow overpower the reinforcements and seize a nice ship which would very likely be equipped with an interplanetary transmitter.

He thought he saw a flicker of movement and spun around. There was no moving thing in sight. He strode to the bedroom door and glanced in. Diane lay where he had dropped her on the Tigerman's bunk, apparently still unconscious. He must have imagined the movement.

Buford turned away, dismissing the matter from his mind. He had more important problems. Stealing a ship from a forewarned and heavily-armed crew wouldn't be exactly child's play.

THE memory of something noted subconsciously during his study of the instrument charts, nagged at his mind. At first it eluded him. Then it came back like a blaze of light. *The gravity plate!* It was powered through the control board here in the cabin, where valves held the gravity at the desired Martian strength.

Furthermore, the huge plate was made in segments, each segment separately activated. If he could switch all the power into one segment he should be able to produce a terrific, crushing gravity in any desired section of the zone.

Working swiftly, he located and bared the feed cables so that the moment the Martian ship landed, he could throw all the terrific pressure of super-gravity into that segment to hold the Tigermen helpless.

"Bring on your army," he exulted aloud when the job was done. "If that gravity isn't enough, I'll cut in more power and drag you clear to the center of the globe."

He sprang to the scanner and spun its dials. Almost instantly he brought the

image of a speeding Martian destroyer into focus. The craft was very close. Already he could see the twinkle of retarder blasts at the nose of the craft as they swung down for a landing.

He watched tensely as the sleek craft settled to the ground just inside the gravity zone. Now to cut in the super-gravity under their landing place and hold them helpless in its grip.

He whirled back to the wires he had prepared for the purpose.

Abruptly the televisor screen flamed to life. Buford halted in midstride as he saw that, instead of the Martian commander, the image was that of a space ship cabin. Three cruel-faced Tigermen leered at him from the screen.

"Stand where you are, Earthman," snarled one. "Our bow gun is focused on the cabin where you stand. If you so much as move one finger while these others are entering, I'll blast you and the cabin to nothing." He deliberately reached out to toy with the trip-lever of a disintegrator gun. "Do you understand, Earthman?"

Behind him, the other Tigermen were donning space suits, lifting heavy guns. And Larry Buford's fingers, inches from the bared wires that meant the success of his plan, was helpless. He knew a single move would mean instant annihilation. His life, the life of the Martian operator on the floor, the lives of a thousand Tigermen meant nothing against the success of the Martian conquest.

He was licked. The balance of his life would be counted in minutes, now. And to move meant death for Diane too.

CHAPTER VI

Preparations for Battle

"STAND very still, Earthman," the Martian purred, "until my men have entered behind you and have you securely bound. I shall be ready to fire at your first movement."

Buford stiffened. Something pale was moving, just beyond the range of his vision, crawling across a corner of the cabin beyond the televisor's range. He dared not even turn his eyes toward the phantom for fear the Tigerman in the space ship would interpret the move as a signal of danger.

The moving shadow drifted to the corner of the switch panel. Then he saw two hands—slender, unforgettable hands—hovering above the gravity-power wires he had bared.

"Larry!" the whisper was scarcely more than an echo in his seething brain, too faint to reach the televisor pickup. "Larry, which wire?"

Lives hung by a thread. There was no time for either wonder or exultation. Larry Buford stared hard into the eyes of the Tigerman's image and snarled:

"You were lucky, mouse-eater. If I'd gotten my hands on the *second wire from the left,* you'd be a goner right now."

Spla-a-a-t!

High tension sparks crackled, filling the cabin with green flickering lights. Down the television beam, Larry saw the Tigermen drop as though crushed by giant, invisible hands. He could see the agony on their faces, their utter helplessness as the supergravity literally nailed them to the floor of their craft.

Buford whirled about and faced Diane Bryan, who stood, face white and eyes glistening with tears, beside the bared wires. Then he leaped toward her and gathered her into his arms.

"Diane!"

"Larry!"

For a single moment they clung together.

"I thought my goose was cooked," he said huskily. "And the thought of going out with you thinking I was a traitor was almost too hard to take."

There was more than a hint of tears in Diane's tremulous voice.

"I thought you were a traitor when I saw you dressed in a Tigerman uniform, and apparently operating a Martian sentry station. I think I really would have died if I had killed you, though."

She disengaged herself from his arms and looked at his shirt, stained with blood from the wound on his ribs.

"You're hurt!" she exclaimed. "I *did* hit you! Oh, Larry!"

He hastened to assure her.

"It's nothing, darling. Just a scratch. It's stopped bleeding already. It won't bother me tomorrow."

"I didn't even believe when I saw the Tigerman on the floor," she said. "I thought he was your assistant, and that he'd been hurt, and you were using him for an alibi. But I hid behind the door and saw your trick to capture a Martian ship, and heard you talking out loud about in-

creasing the gravity. I realized then that you were what I should never have doubted, a true American. . . ."

She buried her face against his shoulder.

"I was just going to come out when the Tigermen in the ship threatened to blast the station if you moved."

"Darling!" Larry whispered fervently. "I'm glad you didn't. They'd have blasted the station off the asteroid!"

RELUCTANTLY he released her.

"We've got work to do now, sweet. We've got to take care of our victims out there on the gravity plate, get their radio working, and warn the Earth fleet of the trap they're running into. . . ."

"Trap?" Her eyes went wide.

"Yes. I found out this asteroid was the source of the powerful explosive, Protonite, which the Martians are using in this war. I radioed headquarters, and the main fleet it going to raid in full force to destroy this base. It may easily mean the difference between losing and winning this war. But right now, unless we manage to warn them, it looks like defeat. The fleet will be wiped out."

He described the trap that had been laid on the asteroid by the Martians, to destroy any attacking fleet. He showed her the maps on the walls, and the indicated areas and weapons.

"And one more thing we've got to do, is secure that Martian ship for our own escape, when we've warned the fleet," he finished.

"But how? You can never move against that terrible pressure."

"I'll have to," Buford answered grimly. "Earth muscles are built to withstand stronger gravity than Martian. I'm gambling that with just enough pressure to pin the Tigermen down, I can still crawl over there and disarm them."

He quickly adjusted the shorted cables to minimum power necessary to hold the Martians helpless. Then he climbed into his space suit and buckled on the drum-gun.

"When you see me in position to cover them with the gun, Di, cut off the gravity. I might not have strength enough to signal. But stand ready to cut it back in if they get the drop on me."

Their lips met for a brief moment. Then he locked his helmet, waved a parting salute and went out through the airlock.

He stepped onto the over-activated segment and instantly a tremendous pressure smashed him flat to the ground. For a moment he lay helpless, then with a superhuman effort he struggled to his knees. His eyes bulged and his heart labored, but somehow he began an inch-by-inch crawl, his super-weighted body digging a deep furrow in the dusty soil. Every breath called for supreme effort, but he kept on grimly.

It seemed hours before he traversed the hundred yards to the ship, more hours until he got the airlock open and dragged himself inside. A single glance showed him that his agony had been unnecessary. The three Martians were dead, suffocated, their feebler lung muscles unable to resist the crushing pressure.

He turned toward the televisor screen. Diane would be watching him, he knew.

"Turn off the gravity, Diane," he mouthed the words.

His body seemed to leap upward as the gravity was cut off. She had seen!

His head reeling from the rush of returning blood, he got to his knees and flipped a weak salute toward the 'visor screen. Diane was visible to him now that he was on his feet. Her radiant smile of relief was like Earth sunshine in the shadowy craft.

He removed his helmet, breathing the manufactured air inside the ship. Then he spoke.

"Hold the fort, Di, until I locate the transmitter and get word through to the fleet. Then we'll pick up anything of importance around the cabin and shove off."

A MOMENT'S search located the powerful interplanetary transceiver. He snapped the switches. There was a single sharp *spat*, a burst of light, then silence.

Stifling a curse, he jerked out the panel to expose the mechanism. A single glance confirmed his fear. The transmitter was useless. The added gravity had smashed the delicate filaments into the base of every tube where they had blown out at the first surge of power.

Once more his attempt to warn the fleet was balked. All the risk and effort had gone for naught.

He explained the bitter facts to Diane in terse sentences, then turned to the receiver.

Martian receivers, operating on the new beam-power principal, used no tubes. Under his touch, the instrument came to life.

He moved dials to the Earth channel. Almost immediately he heard voices conversing in what would sound to Martian ears like unintelligible gibberish. But to Space Guardsman Larry Buford, the scrambled code was clear.

"Diane!" he shouted. "The fleet is less than half a million miles away right now. They'll be coming down, getting into range of the disintegrators within the next three hours."

"We'll have to fly up to meet them, warn them away," she cried.

"That would be suicide. The minute we took off, the Tigermen would turn the disintegrators on us. They must know by this time that we've still got the whip hand here and they'll be expecting just such an attempt."

"Larry!" her voice came over the televisor, "there's still a chance! I found out about it when Hur-tha, the man you knew as Wolsak, contacted the asteroid headquarters when he was coming in with me. I know how to read the maps. The blue areas . . . They are safe channels between the disintegrator beams, criss-crossing the whole planetoid. Once on a blue channel, every Martian craft has a device that warns the pilot whenever he approaches a disintegrator beam. That's how their ships move around in safety."

"Wha-a-at?" His voice quivered with excitement. "Di, you're the wonder girl of the age. Are there clear channels to headquarters and to the *Protonite* mine? Is there a warning device on this ship?"

"Of course. We were going from headquarters to the mine when we crashed. Vadis himself is at the mine today on a secret inspection tour. Hur-tha was rushing to Vadis to give him Earth defense secrets he had stolen from my father. I broke the paralysis ray that was holding me and fought him until we crashed. But—what about Hur-tha? You didn't say where he was. He can still . . ."

"Hoary Venusians!" Larry shouted exultantly. "Don't worry about Hur-tha. He was deader than an asteroid when I picked him up. And Vadis himself is at the mine? Whoopee! Kid, we'll blow Vadis, his mine and his interplanetary war into a million pieces. . . ."

"Larry! The Tigerman—the operator you left here—he's beginning to stir."

"Perfect!"

He grinned at her puzzled stare.

"You've got your gun, Di. Get into your space suit fast and come out here to the ship. Don't let the Tigerman get the jump on you but be sure to leave him loose and free. He's going to help us win this war, sweet."

HE watched while Diane scrambled into her suit, covering the moaning Tigerman with her pistol. Finally she closed her helmet, backed to the airlock and disappeared. The Tigerman sat up dizzily, stared around the cabin. Buford saw his cat-eyes widen as the televisor gave him a view of the ship outside.

As though unaware that the Tigerman was watching, Buford snapped switches and bent over the useless transmitter.

"Hello, Earth fleet. Hello, Earth fleet. Can you hear me? Lieutenant Buford calling from Planetoid 1535. Come down and start your attack at once. The *Protonite* mine is at the north pole. Strike there first. The Martians don't know you have those new armor screens that repel their disintegrator beams. They'll depend on the beams instead of sending up their defense fleet until it's too late. You can mop up the whole planetoid with almost no resistance."

He turned and pretended to be aware for the first time that the Tigerman operator was leering at him through the televisor. He twisted his face into a look of dismay and hurriedly snapped off the plate.

Behind him, Diane Bryan said:

"Larry Buford, are you crazy? That Martian will tip off headquarters that the Earth fleet is coming and they'll have the sky full of defense ships."

"Right, hon," Buford grinned tantalizingly. "And with the sky full of Martian ships, they won't *dare* turn on their disintegrator guns. As for the fleet, we've given them a fighting chance for the first time."

Abruptly his face sobered. He took both Diane's hands and looked into her eyes.

"How about it, Di? Is the old home world worth dying for? You've risked your neck a dozen times over already. Will you risk it once more?"

"A hundred times more to keep these beasts from making slaves of all humanity," Diane answered simply.

"Good girl! The fleet won't be within striking distance for at least an hour or two. Meanwhile, we've got the whole Martian

war machine discomboobled, wondering whether they're coming or going. And up north, at the end of a clear channel," Buford pointed to a blue line on the ship's chart, "Vadis himself, the Warlord of Creation, is watching them turn out *Protonite*, the most destructive substance the universe has ever seen."

"You mean . . ."

"I mean—let's use that last hour to show 'em what a guy and a gal and a ship and a gun can do . . . when they fly the right flag."

From inside the Tigerman uniform, he drew a bundle of folded silk—red stripes and white stripes and a field of star-sprinkled blue. The American Flag, gift of the Space Guard.

"Our wedding flag," he said. "I've kept it in memory of . . ." his voice trembled suddenly, broke ". . . a bunch of real pals."

Diane saluted, white-faced then held out her hand.

"Shoulder to shoulder, partner," she said. "We'll carry it for them."

CHAPTER VII

Into Inferno

"TURN right!" Diane said. "Sharp right."

She was hunched over the box-like instrument on the panel of the Martian ship, an instrument where a green light glowed as long as they were in the center of a safety lane between disintegrator beams, but where red lights showed whenever they neared a danger zone.

"When we get back to Earth," Larry Buford marveled, feeding left rocket to swing the roaring craft, "let's patent this traffic system. It's a honey."

"*If* we get back," Diane reminded him.

She pointed ahead at a dark scar on the distant horizon.

"There is the *Protonite* mine and from what I heard during the weeks I was captive, it's surrounded by camouflaged hangars for a destroyer fleet."

"Buckle yourself in, Di. This can wasn't made for ground-strafing. I'll have to do a nose dive to hit anything with the stationary gun."

With the words, he flipped the sleek Martian craft onto its nose, sent it screaming down toward the innocent-appearing scar on the dead terrain milles below.

"Hang on!" He tripped the disintegrator release.

The ship trembled to the blast. Far below black holes leaped into sight against the dead gray ground—a line of gaping pits that marched inexorably toward the *Protonite* mine.

"Larry! Off there to the right! Destroyers pouring out of camouflaged hangars after us."

"They're slow!" he answered with grim humor. "Another fleet off here to the left is already in the air, headed this way with blood in their eyes. It'll be a grand fight, Di."

Disregarding the converging attackers, he centered the diving ship on the vulnerable mine head. With that key spot destroyed, the Martians would be deprived of the terrible destructive power of *Protonite*, without which they were no match for the fleets of Earth.*

But now, with the goal so near, the difficulty of assaulting it became apparent. In the van of its companions came a swift destroyer, manned by the best of Tigerman space-fighters. It zoomed upward with breath-taking speed, and Buford saw it coming.

"Hang on, Diane," he yelled. "We've got to fight through this fellow. He means business."

Swiftly he sent the captured Martian ship down in a dive that matched the zoom of the attacker. For a long, paralyzing instant both ships roared toward each other, nose to nose.

Diane screamed. But Buford was grinning—that tight, set grin that was always on his face when he fought. He squinted through the sights, and waited two long seconds more—then came the lightning motion as he depressed the firing lever and at the same time hurled the ship to the left in a body-wracking turn.

To their right a mushroom of flame burst

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* The substance here mentioned is an ore of the magnesium family, which possesses the faculty of detonating basically upon disturbance of the protons in its atoms. This is accomplished by means of electron-rays (small radium particles) which unbalance the atoms much as U-235 is detonated by slow electrons when immersed in water. The result is an uncontrolled explosion of great violence, very unlike the controlled U-235 on which atomic power is based.—Ed.

out, and to Diane's dazed eyes it seemed they passed right through the fringe of its orange brilliance. Sharp blows against the hull told of flying fragments.

"Oh . . . Larry!" gasped the girl. "That was . . ."

"Perfect!" exulted Buford. "I never made a better nose-on shot in my life. They never knew what hit 'em. And they were afraid to fire at us for fear of taking the rebound of their own ray. That's the old football stiff-arm and side-step."

HE sent the ship roaring on now, toward the Protonite mine. Once more he lined his sights on the ground, and depressed the firing lever. The black holes in the soil marched forward with incredible rapidity.

"Hurry!" cried Diane. "The destroyer fleet is right behind us!"

Larry Buford peered ahead tensely. What was that strange object rising from the roof of the mine building?

Suddenly he identified it.

"Protonite cannon!" he muttered. "We'll be within range of it long before our own gun can blast the mine . . ."

Grimly he set his lips, but kept silent. No use to tell Diane of Death's two-way approach. Maybe, if he was lucky, Death's two palms would sting. . . .

Once again he timed himself, this time with a silent prayer for a lucky guess—a few seconds one way or the other and . . . Unconsciously he shrugged.

All at once he swerved the little Martian ship sharply to the right and toward the ground, and continuing on in a sharp arc, swept in until he came back to his original course, but a full mile below it. He was still in the clear channel.

But in the midst of the dizzying maneuver, a terrific blast of flame shot from the roof of the mine. It roared through the rarefied air of the planetoid like a billion demons, seeming to beat back even the very ground itself in cowering fear.

Like a thunderbolt of utter destruction it leaped—exactly through the spot where the little ship had been a few seconds before —and continued on, squarely into the middle of the pursuing destroyer fleet!

A full dozen ships dropped down, shattered wrecks, flaming funeral pyres for the men in them. The Protonite gun had devastated a portion of its own fleet!—and Buford realized with a sickening sense of horror that the Martian dictator, Vadis, had known many of his own men would be shot down, but had callously disregarded the certainty of it.

And because of Buford's maneuver, the blast had missed its real victim!

Buford turned to look at Diane before he forged on toward the destruction of the mine. Her eyes were black spots in her white face, and she looked sick.

"If I must die," she gasped, "I suppose it's better to be because of your driving than an enemy cannon!"

He grinned at her.

"Brave kid!" he whispered. "They won't lick us now, I promise!"

There was a bright gleam in his eyes that spelled more than just determination. He fixed them on the mine. Then, abruptly, he depressed the firing lever. The line of black holes raced across the planetoid's surface—and straight into the mine building!

With staggering suddenness, and incomparable violence, a terrific explosion rocked the planetoid. The little flyer hurtled upward toward space as though driven by the hellish fury of all the released atoms of a giant nova.

"There it goes!" Buford roared, and Diane's voice joined in the triumphant shout. "We've won!"

Where the *Protonite* mine had been there was now only a mile-deep chasm. Whatever happened to them now, they had dealt Vadis, the Dictator of Mars, a crushing blow.

And the green light on Diane's indicator had gone out too. No longer were those deadly zones of death all about them.

BUT there was no time for celebration. Buford stood the craft on its tail and blasted it skyward. His maneuver came a second too late. The sky above seemed filled with an impenetrable wall of Martian destroyers.

The ship rocked to blasts of fire and shell plates groaned ominously at the terrific bursts that flamed all around them. Larry shifted to foot controls, leaving his hands free for the gun trip, and sent the ship dancing on an elusive, zigzag course.

The Martians, confident of quick and easy victory, had held a tight formation. Before they could scatter, his deadly fire dissolved a destroyer in a cloud of silvery mist. Two others fell away with rocket

tubes melted. Another limped off under half-blast, trying to make feeble steering rockets support a shattered bow.

"Come and get it, you mouse-eaters!" Buford shouted, hurling the tiny ship in and out like a rapier of flame, leaving destruction in the wake of every thrust.

For a time, sheer blundering numbers of the enemy gave him an advantage. But eventually the Martians abandoned mass tactics and scattered so that wherever Buford turned, there was a leaping, darting enemy to face him with blasting guns. It became increasingly evident that not even his superb piloting could keep them from destruction much longer.

"Shall we say goodbye?" Diane asked soberly, as they zoomed out of a death trap, missing annihilation by a hair. "The rocket fuel is just about gone."

"Then we sprout wings and keep on fighting. We've got to keep the Martian navy in the sky until our fleet gets here."

"Start sprouting, then," Diane said a moment later. She pointed toward a cloud of silver streaks rising from the far rim of the Planetoid's disc. "Here come Vadis's superdreadnaughts, every one with a *Protonite* gun. One blast of that, anywhere within a hundred yards, and we're gone."

"If they blast us, they'll blast half the Martian space navy with us!" promised Buford grimly.

He deliberately hurled their craft into the very thick of the destroyer fleet. For an eternity it was dive, blast, dodge and dive again, in and out of a seething hell of bursting energy bombs, disintegrator beams and sleek black ships. But inexorably, the heavier ships ringed them in until there was no direction open for escape. And up from below roared the superdreadnaughts for the killing blow.

"I guess," Buford said tightly, "they're going to say goodbye for us. Well, neither Earth nor Mars will forget us for a while, Di. I'm going to make a last dive at that leading dreadnaught. I'd like to take just one of those elephants along when we go."

For a moment their lips met. Then, tight-faced, they bent over the control panel. Directly below, the first of the big ships was roaring up, bringing guns to bear. With a little more of their miraculous luck, they could dive close enough to get in one good blow before the finish.

"Here goes nothing!" Buford cried and gave the craft full rocket.

"LARRY!" Diane's voice rang in the tiny cabin. "Look! It's gone!"

Where the dreadnaught had been, there was suddenly nothing but a faint silvery haze. Off to the right, a destroyer vanished with a roaring explosion. Then, before Buford could level off, the sky around them filled with a melee of bursting shells and seething rays.

"The Earth fleet! Give it to them, Space Guards!"

WITH tears of excitement in their eyes, they watched wave after wave of blue battle cruisers roar down to engage the disorganized Martians.

"Let's get up above the fight," Larry said suddenly. "If we run out of rocket fuel now, we wouldn't last ten seconds in this mess."

He flipped the small craft skyward and bored up through the milling hordes toward the freedom of outer space. Abruptly the little ship lurched and bucked. Two of their rocket tubes went dead as explosive energy burst over them.

"Hey! Cut it out, you guys!" Larry roared.

Two Earth cruisers, mistaking them for another enemy craft, were dogging their tail with destruction pouring from their bow guns.

Up, up, beyond the last thread of gravity into the purple darkness of space they fled, twisting and turning. But the two Earth craft, manned by men who had learned fighting in the same school with Larry Buford, would not be shaken off. Inexorably they drew closer.

Larry Buford crowded on all the speed the little ship possessed in an effort to escape into space.

"Can't do it," he groaned. "If only that transmitter wasn't wrecked! We've no way to signal them our identity."

He locked the controls, and turned to face Diane. The pursuing ships would come up slowly, but surely, and blast them into eternity.

But the cabin of the cruiser was empty! Diane was not in the ship. A single swift, startled glance told him that her space suit was also gone. With a leap he reached the port and stared into the airlock. The inner door was closed, and the outer was just opening. And through it he saw Diane's figure float slowly away from the cruiser.

She had deserted him!

For an instant Buford was stunned. Just a few moments before, she had seemed the bravest women he had ever known. She had been a woman any man could be proud to fight and to die for. She had been a true fighter. And now, with no more certain death facing her than before, she had abandoned ship, left him to his own fate, without a word of warning, of farewell!

"Diane," he moaned. "Why . . ."

Then he stopped, his eye caught by a flicker of motion outside. He leaped to a porthole and stared, and as he stared, his heart swelled within his breast, and a wave of abject shame swept over him. Shame that he could have doubted, after such glorious proof, the bravery of the woman he loved. Shame that he could have believed she would cravenly desert him.

For out there in space fluttered the outspread American Flag, an unmistakable signal of identity to the pursuing Space Guard ships.

And that they had seen was evident, for their fire ceased, and the lead ship dipped in salute. They were safe!

"Diane," muttered Buford silently to the drifting, space-suited figure outside the hull, so bravely waving its signal banner, "you brave little fool. I'll never deserve a girl like you . . ."

"IT was a grand fight, Lieutenant Buford," Commander Rohlein exulted. "And thanks to you and Miss Bryan, the war with Mars is over. We caught Vadis himself sneaking away in his private cruiser and blasted him out of the sky. It will be a long time before the Tigermen let another maniac talk them into attempting to conquer Earth."

In the cabin of the victorious Earth flag ship, heading back across space toward home, Larry Buford grinned happily and tightened the pressure of his arm around Diane's shoulders.

"Diane has another exploit to her credit," he grinned. "She's the first person to ever wave an American flag in space. I'm still goose-pimples when I remember how tiny she looked, floating away out there in the darkness. If you hadn't seen her!"

"Um-m-m! Fortunately, we did," Commander Rohlein started to speak again, saw that neither Larry Buford nor Diane were paying any attention to him, and moved toward the door.

Outside the cabin he stopped, turned back toward the pair he had left.

"Lieutenant Buford."

"Yes, sir!"

"Your next post is right in here, guarding the person of Miss Bryan. If you desert *this* post, I'll court-martial you, sure as hell!"

He went out quickly and slammed the door.

For a moment Buford looked at Diane, a peculiar expression on his face.

She returned his look.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I was just thinking," he said. "About Wolsak—or Hur-than, as he turned out to be—that night in the garden . . ."

"What about it?"

"You two were quite chummy . . ."

Abruptly she laughed and pulled his face down to hers.

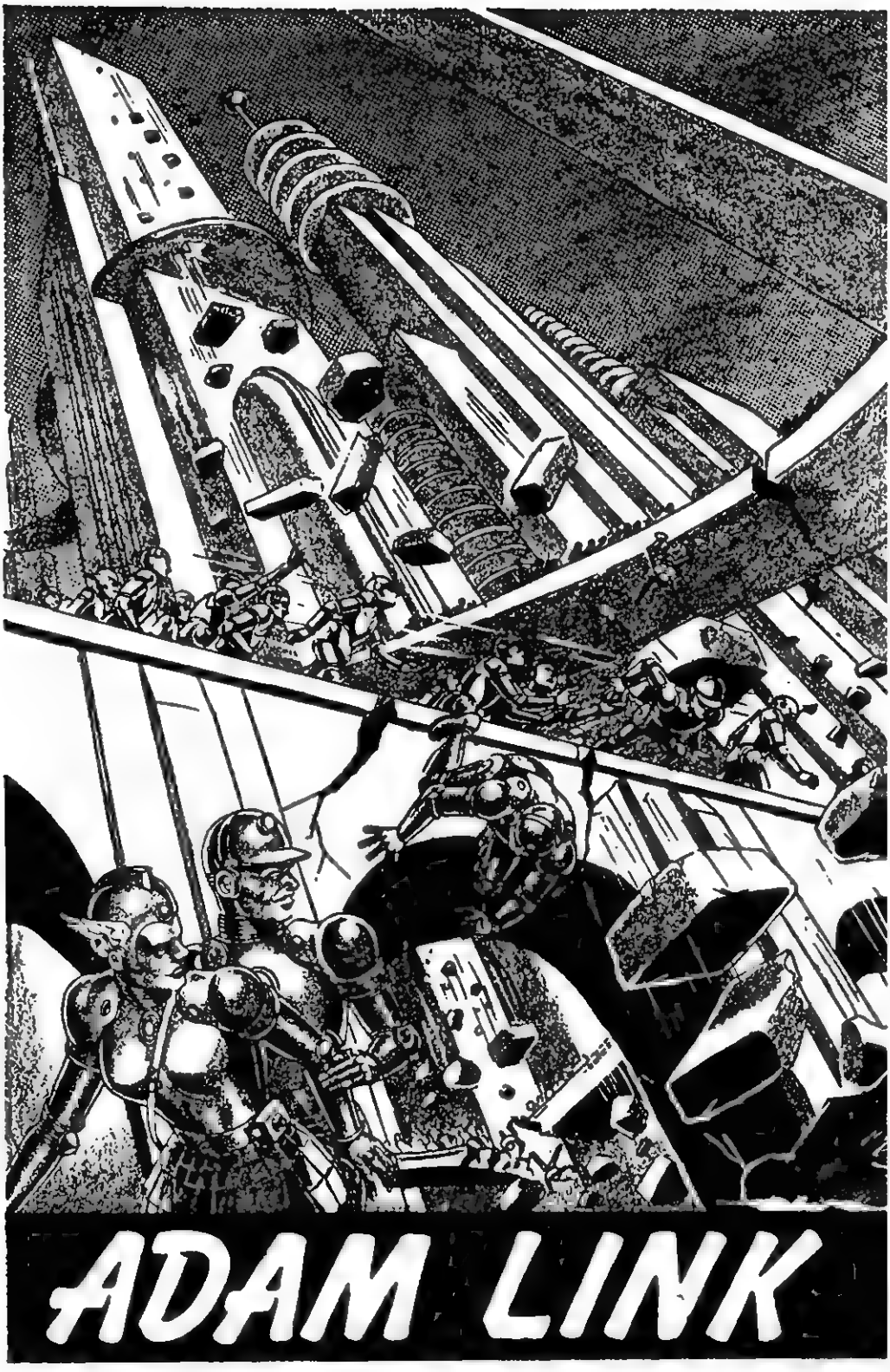
"Silly," she said, kissing him. "Don't be a jealous ninny. After all, Wolsak was the European Envoy, and he was a pretty important man to Daddy and his Defense Research. I had to be nice to him, even though he took advantage of his position to be a bit too familiar. Besides, I knew . . ." she hesitated.

"Knew what?" he asked.

"That you'd cool his rockets if he got too fresh!"

Buford grinned. "You don't know the half of it. The only thing that saved him that night was that Martian ship, breaking regulations!"

"Hello, Earth! The first MEN have landed on Venus, and half the population is giving us a royal welcome!"


ADAM LINK

"UTOPIA?" Eve said, startled.

I had just used the word. We had been talking for twenty-four hours straight, discussing our next "move" in the world of humans. We had just returned, a week before, from our adventure in the past. I had gone to seek out Thor, the legendary robot, and compare notes with him.

I had come back dazed, for I was Thor! It was one of Time's profound paradoxes. I did not like to dwell on it too much. It offered no solution, anyway, to my present-day problem.

"Utopia?" Eve repeated. "What misty, romantic nonsense are you toying with in your mind? Erewhon—nowhere! Let's keep the discussion sane, Adam. This can lead you to a blind wall."

But the idea had fired me.

"I mean a *practical* Utopia. A Utopia of science and machines. Put humans in a Utopia and they might very well be near to gods."

Eve shook her head, as though I were an obstinate child.

"Adam, it won't work, not without social advancement. Humans aren't ready for Utopia. And you couldn't achieve it single-handedly, anyway." After a moment she added, "Even if you are Adam Link!"

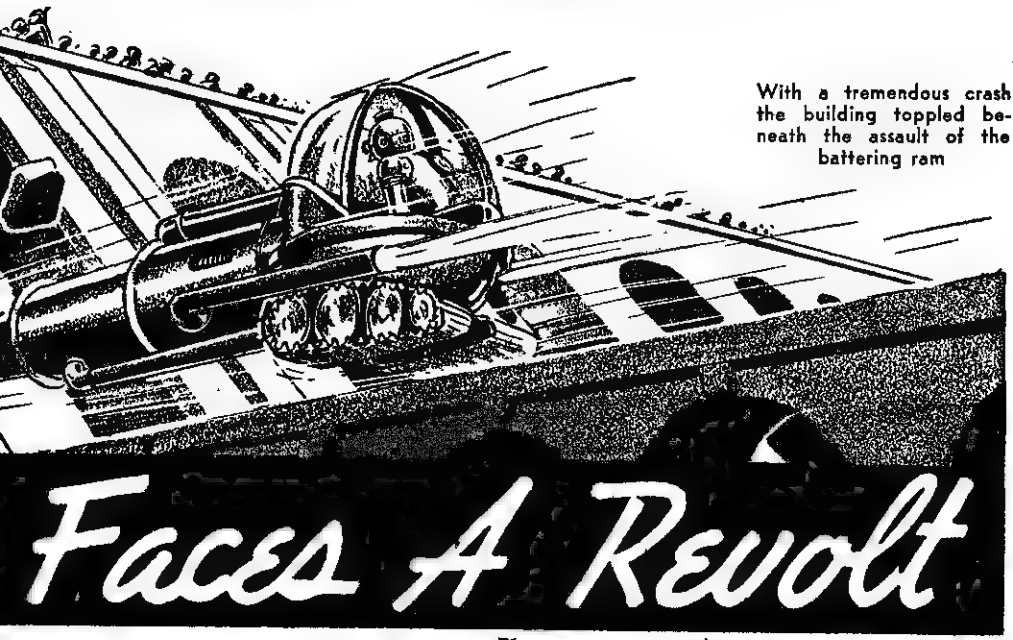
No, I couldn't. But the word "Utopia" still mulled around in my mind, refusing to leave.

Eve went on with a sigh.

"It is a wonderful thought, though. There *could* be Utopia all over Earth, if once they made up their minds to it. Or if they let us lead them to it. But the humans have rejected us, scorned us, even tried to destroy us. We are an orphan form

by EANDO BINDER

Fired with the idea of creating a Utopia, Adam Link built an amazing perfect city. But he found that it is quite possible for robots to be as imperfect as humans.



With a tremendous crash the building toppled beneath the assault of the battering ram

Faces A Revolt

of life, Adam. That is our fate."

I might have agreed a while before. But a blazing thought struck me.

"Utopia!" I breathed. "All over Earth —no. But what about a *private* Utopia?"

"What?" Eve was puzzled.

"My own Utopia! The Utopia of Adam Link!" My microphonic voice crackled. "I'll show the world. I'll build a segment of Utopia, and set it before their blind eyes. I'll push it in their stubborn faces. I'll build it in the middle of a desert, and make them writhe in shame for their backwardness. Utopia, Eve. Do you hear me —Utopia!"

Beside Eve, half the mountain creatures must have heard, within a radius of a mile. I was shouting, in my new determination. I am typically a man that way, ready to battle anything in my way to put over a new idea.

Eve looked at me wonderingly, half awed, half skeptical. She is typically a woman that way, startled at her man's sudden, overwhelming decisions.

"Adam Link," she murmured, "Utopia builder!"

A FLOWER bloomed in the desert.

In one month the foundations were going up. In three months the project was in full swing. In six months it was done. A city had sprung full-grown from barren sand.

Eve and I did not do it alone, of course. Nor did I employ human laborers. No human group, of any size or quality, could have accomplished the feat. Robots were the answer.

To start from the beginning, Eve and I made one hundred new iridium-sponge brains, in our Ozark hideaway, and brought them to "life." In a week's time, we taught them to speak, read and write. Robots are able to skip from "birth" to "maturity" as quickly as their full-capacity brains are crammed with knowledge. Conducting classes twenty-four hours a day, Eve and I taught them the main essentials of life and learning, at a rate a hundred times faster than in human schools.

Curiously, though, they were not all uniform in mental capacity. Some were not as "bright" as others, and learned more slowly. One, in fact, Robot Number Nine, turned out to be a real dullard, failing to learn his ABC's in less than three hours after creation. I suppose, in his particular iridium-sponge brain, fewer electrons drummed through each thinking cell. Eve and I could not always turn out a perfect sponge from the electrolytic baths that had produced the metal-brains.

But most were normal, and absorbed the principles of Einstein's Relativity by the second week. Number Sixty-Six, however, had deduced Einstein relativity in a week—by himself. He became our special pupil, advancing so rapidly that we realized his capacity was close to ours. Our brains, Eve's and mine, had been made with special care. Mine by Dr. Link, first creator of a robot. Eve's by myself.

Progress was rapid, among them all, when they were fully able to read and understand the meanings behind printed words. I let them loose in my library of selected books which sum-totaled the essence of human knowledge.

Picture, if you can, a hundred shiny metal forms in rows, passing books along. Each robot flipped the pages rapidly, scanning and absorbing whole paragraphs instantly, with their television eyesight. Books were read in a half hour, from cover to cover. By the time a book reached the hundredth robot, it was in tatters from the metal fingers. But the contents of the book were thereafter imprinted indelibly in one hundred photographic minds.

AT the end of a month, our hundred new companions were full-fledged "adults." They were ready for any task set before them. Ready to go out in the world. And then I hesitated.

"What's the matter, Adam? They've turned out splendidly."

I looked at Eve strangely.

"So did those at the silver mine in California. But they ended tragically!"

Eve knew what I meant. Once again I was creating a body of robots. Launching the robot race. Into what future? What could be their accepted niche in human society? Into what Promised Land could I, their Moses, lead them?

"Not into the present world, which would misuse them," Eve said. "But into Utopia, Adam. Into the world of our making. Into a cross-section of the future!"

My doubts vanished. "Thanks, Eve," I said, and called my robot tribe before me.

"Fellow robots," I addressed them. "There is no place for our kind in the

present world. I have told you my story. But we can *make* a place for ourselves. Not a strictly robot-community, for it would soon be attacked by humans. Rather it will be a city where humans and robots live side by side, in mutual respect and dependence. We'll build such a place. We'll show the sadly misguided humans what such a world can be, if only they will accept us as servants and helpers."

There were questions, naturally.

"These humans," Number Fourteen asked. "They are stupid?"

"Perhaps just stubborn," I answered. "They cling to old ideas and outworn traditions."

"Like the letter Q?" Number Sixty-Six said, as usual the quickest to perceive. "And the clumsy foot-and-pound scale of measures?" Then he asked—"But why do they war?"

I had had them read history, so that all human doings in past and present times were known to them. They had always been most amazed at that queerest, most tragic of human follies—warfare.

"They do not know why themselves, much less we," I said bitingly. More practically, I added: "Mainly it is an economic factor. We will eliminate that factor in our model city."

"You mean," said slow-witted Number Nine, "we will build the buildings without that? What is 'economic.' Like cement?"

We all laughed. Robots laugh silently, but nonetheless heartily. And we sense it in each other by little mannerisms—a blink of the eye mirrors, a twitch of a finger, a sidelong glance. Poor Number Nine, the butt of much of our laughter, clinked in embarrassment as he edged back.

"Ready, men?" I said, as no more question came. "Let's go, then. On to Utopia!"

NO, we didn't march out like an army. A hundred shiny robots marching across country would have brought out the militia in every state. Everything was done in accordance with human methods.

Eve and I detached the heads from the bodies, packed each separately in straw, and shipped the whole in hired trucks. Eve and I, more or less accepted—or tolerated—by the world, could get such things done. We had money, and money talks. I think if a Martian with five heads came out of nowhere, holding out a thousand dollars of Earth money, the average human would sell him something first, and then come around to being startled at the visitation.

"Money is too much a force in itself," I said to Eve. "There will be no money, and its evils, in Utopia City."

Two weeks later, our hundred robots, reassembled, sparkled under the hot sun of central Nevada. All around us was the scrubby desert, as far as the eye could reach. I had picked the most desolate spot on the map, for my venture. Even my robots, unaffected by heat or thirst, murmured at the utter barrenness.

"The nearest large city is 500 miles away," I informed them, stepping on a rattlesnake after it had futilely broken its fangs against my alloy leg. "The nearest railroad junction is 100 miles. The nearest village—and that of Indians—50 miles. The nearest human, if there happens to be a wandering prospector, perhaps ten miles. To humans, this would be the last place in the world to build a city. There are no roads, rivers, farms, or any connection with the outside civilization. We are as alone here as if on Mars."

I swept an arm around.

"Here," I finished, "We will build Utopia!"

I WILL not go into elaborate detail.

With the fleet of trucks I had purchased, certain of my robots drove 100 miles to the nearest railroad terminal. Here they picked up endless loads of materials I had begun ordering. Cement, stone, steel beams, rivets, lumber, nails—all the paraphernalia of architecture.

The cost meant nothing. I had a dozen minor inventions on the market, all paying me handsome royalties through anonymous sources. I could invent a dozen other trifles, when needed, to ring the cash registers of any industry or factory in the country.

The ceaseless caravan shuttled back and forth, bringing the bricks of Utopia.

Those of my robots not engaged in driving began building. Specialized bodies had been ordered for them. Some had superstrong arms, for carrying. Others had rivet-hammer arms, sawing arms, hammer hands, pulley arms, etc. My robots were laborer and machine in one unit. Several were veritable cranes, with long arms attached to wide flat bases. Some were mounted on tractor wheels, to pull loads of cement or steel to the desired spot.

Tireless, efficient, strong, my hundred robots worked without cease under the burning sun by day, under floodlights by night. Rapidly the city took form and grew. Blue-prints had been memorized by all. Each knew every step. Eve was superintendent, but seldom gave orders.

Still, there were hitches. Even robots must be allowed mistakes. One day a huge steel girder slipped from the cable hauling it up, and crashed down on Number Fifty-One, smashing his body to bits. But five minutes later his head, attached to a replacement body, was back at work. Also, Number Thirty fell from a height of 300 feet—luckily not on his head—and he was back at work in five minutes with a new body.

And so, the schedule of construction went on apace. My robots did not complain at the driving pace, except once. I let them have a day off, to loaf, and thereafter gave them one hour out of twenty-four of idleness. Even robots must have moments of mental relaxation.

A special personal problem came up soon after. Eve shouted at Number Sixty-Six one day, as he seemed about to let one end of a girder slip out of his grasp. He recovered, then came down from his scaffold.

From my laboratory-workshop, I heard him arguing with Eve. I ran out.

"Number Sixty-Six is dissatisfied," Eve said.

"I'm not meant to be a common laborer," Number Sixty-Six spoke up. "It bores me."

"But Utopia must be built—" I began sharply, when a thought struck me. "Perhaps you're right, Sixty-Six. You have the best mind of the group. I need a laboratory assistant. How does that strike you?"

"Fine," he nodded. "But I want a name, too, instead of a number."

"A name?" I stared at him. He was a queer personality. "What name?"

"Oh, anything except a number that makes me feel like a part on an assembly line. Call me"—his eyes flicked over a steel beam—"Steele, let's say. A first name too—Frank! Short for Frankenstein, you know."

I didn't appreciate the humor. I had had all these robots read the book, by Shelley's wife, as a demonstration of how deeply rooted was the baseless human fear of created life. Forewarned is forearmed. But I didn't like Number Sixty-Six's ironic attitude. Still, I had suspected he would be a special case. He would be best under my eye, in the laboratory.

"All right, Frank Steele," I nodded. "Come in the workship with me."

CHAPTER II

Utopia Begins

MY laboratory work, in those months, had been in preparation for the completed city. I had all the latest equipment for modern inventive research. Ultra-modern, I must add. For the things I devised were of the century ahead.

Transparent steel, flexible glass, and 3-dimensional television were on file. Also a dozen other things that would make Utopia befit its name, as a mechanical elysium.

"Humans are going to be amazed at the wonders of Utopia City," I told Number Sixty-Six. Or Frank Steele, as I'll now call him.

I pointed to a half-completed machine.

"A force-cushion projector. It will be useful to prevent auto accidents, for instance. But I'm stuck. How can momentum be absorbed?"

Frank Steele bent over the machine. An hour later he saw nothing I hadn't, being too close to the problem.

"Molecular distribution," he said. "Dissipate it into the core of the atom."

And we had a force-cushion that would serve as an invisible bumper for any vehicle. With Frank Steele, my work forged ahead rapidly, in this Menlo Park of the desert. Thomas Edison, I understand, patented almost a thousand things in his lifetime. In six months, I devised two thousand new improvements and inventions to insure a smooth-running Utopia mechanically advanced to a degree unknown in the outside world.

The ramparts of this work rose in keeping with the city. In six months both were done. The Great Day had come.

THE Great Day was memorable.

With my hundred robots, we stood on a low hill, looking down on the flatness that held the city. It gleamed in the sun like a huge jewel. I turned proudly.

"You have done well, men," I commended. "It is here that our robot race will find its haven. It is here that a new age will

dawn for mankind—Utopia!"

"If they will appreciate it," Frank Steele murmured. "According to their literature, human nature is unpredictable."

I ignored that, and chuckled as Number Nine again put his foot in his mouth.

"But Adam Link! We've left out something. It said in a book that cities are filled with noise and smoke. We forgot those!"

"There'll be smoke and noise enough, once humans are in it," I predicted.

And that was the next step, to people this empty city.

I ran into wholly unforeseen difficulties. First I tried judicious advertising, in national magazines and newspapers.

"Opportunity! Homes to let. New, modern city. No advance or capital necessary. Open to anyone seeking permanent establishment in congenial surroundings. Write for details, Box F-114."

Queries came in from widely scattered points. Mainly, they wanted to know where the location was. When told, there was no further answer. I suppose, by merely saying "central Nevada," I had as good as said—"middle of nowhere, out in the desert, where only rattlesnakes make a living."

"No one wants to come, Eve," I said gloomily. "Not one citizen is willing to take a chance."

But that same day, an old battered car came winding along the road my trucks had worn from the railroad terminal to the south. Eve and I strode to meet it, as it topped the last rise. The car stopped. It had an Oklahoma license plate.

A man, woman and six children tumbled out. The man was unshaven, grimy, dressed in shabby overalls. The woman was slovenly. The children were obviously allergic to soap.

"You that there Adam Link?" asked the man, staring. He stared only for a moment, then shrugged. Adam Link was after all no longer a startling novelty. I was accepted, like rain and death and taxes, as something in the course of events. At least in the common mind.

"Be this the place advertised?" the man went on, sending a stream of tobacco juice to the sand. "Me an' my family would like to try it."

I began to shake my head, for these were Okies—wandering nomads who seldom stayed in one spot except to degrade it to their level. I wanted good, upright citizens in Utopia.

"Welcome!" Eve said, before I could think of an excuse to shunt them away. "Welcome to Utopia! What is your name?"

"Jed Tomkins. My wife here is Melinda. An' my young-uns." He hesitated, a little abashed, and took off his battered hat. "We ain't got any money—"

"You won't need money," Eve said kindly. "Just drive your car along the road ahead."

"Thank you, ma'am."

THEY piled in and the old wreck groaned forward. I clutched Eve's arm.

"What have you done, Eve? We don't want human derelicts in Utopia!"

"Who else are you going to get out in the middle of a desert?" Eve responded. "Look, Adam. This can be the greatest social experiment in history. Let's take Okies, and tramps, and slum people, and human flotsam. No matter how poor and downtrodden. Let's show the world how Utopia—*our* kind of life—can mold them into worthwhile citizens. Let's give the world a *real* scolding for their social maladjustment!"

Eve turned, and I followed thoughtfully. Yes, why not start Utopia from scratch? Do it the hard way? Prove it could be done, with intelligence and understanding?

The car ahead had stopped. The occupants again tumbled out, to stand staring down over the rise at the revealed city.

With distinct shock, the eye passed from heat-hazed sand to sudden greenery. For the whole city was surrounded by groves of trees and a carpet of luxuriant grass.

The trees and grass-sod had been imported, of course, installed by my robots as the final step. Sand had been made fertile by pulverizing it through proton-bombardment, and then impregnating it with common fertilizer. Water came from a well that had been sunk 5000 feet by special apparatus I invented.

The lanes of trees marched into the avenues of the city, shedding their welcome shade everywhere.

Jed Tomkins and family blinked their eyes, as though in disbelief.

"Why—why it's like Heaven!" Melinda Tomkins murmured. "Look, children, we're going to live there!"

With a whoop, the children ran toward it, ignoring the car. Jed Tomkins turned to us, before driving on.

"Looks mighty fine. I have a funny feeling this is the place I'm goin' to stay, for good!"

Unconsciously, he brushed dirt from his sleeve, and his eyes narrowed as though blinded by more than the desert's glare.

IN the following month, Eve and I had the thrill of that same look in many other eyes. They flocked in now, from the hovels of civilization. Bits broken off from the lowest social strata. They alone cared to chance the desert. It could not be worse than what they came from.

Eventually, I had to block the road and limit immigration to 10,000. All turned aside were given their passage back and a hundred dollars in cash.

The city was small, no more than a cross-section of what larger ones could be. But planned intelligently. Every street was ten lanes wide, for auto traffic. Trucks would ascend to second-level ramps of transparent steel, which let subdued sunlight filter down as shade. Each building was surrounded by a park area, green and inviting. Flower-beds lined all walks. A beautiful, arboreal city, ideal for human habitation.

And robot habitation. Contrary to superficial thought, the human-like robot must have pleasant surroundings for the delight of the mind.

In general plan, there was a "downtown" section, with necessary office buildings, factories, recreational buildings, and a power-plant. The rest was residential, with neat cottages, from small to large, dotting the uniform sward.

No, not greatly different from other human cities. But with roominess, and wide streets, and natural surroundings. No close-packed buildings, shutting out light and air, harboring humans like so many sardines. A man did not step out of his front door into a maelstrom of crowded humanity.

But mostly, I expected to introduce a new spirit, above and beyond the inspiring environment. That would make Utopia earn its name—cooperation.

My robots, well trained, apportioned each incoming family or person to homes, like silent butlers. A little fearful of the metal guides, the people at first shrank and seemed unhappy at coming. But quickly, as no harm came to them, they breathed more easily and eagerly set themselves up in their new dwellings.

When the quota was filled, I called a general meeting in Utopia Square, downtown, bordered with neatly clipped hedges.

"Citizens of Utopia City," I addressed them. "I have little to say. This will be your home, for as long as you want it. I trust you to keep up its appearance."

A murmur of assent came from the massed crowd. Faces were scrubbed and shiny. Already, since being here, the people had responded to the clean, uplifting environment. Most were hardly recognizable for the tired, dirty, discouraged beings who had arrived.

A man strode from the crowd. I knew him from my memorized register as Sam Harley, unemployed factory worker who had come with his wife and three children. He was large, florid-faced, outspoken.

"But what are we to do, Adam Link?" he asked, and the crowd nodded as if he had expressed their common thought. "What work are we to do? How do we make a living, in plain words? This whole set-up is nice, all right—but puzzling as hell! Nobody ever gave us something for nothing before. What's the *catch?*"

I had an answer prepared.

"There is no catch. This is to be Utopia, the city of the future. Yet even in Utopia there must be labor, earning. That will be revealed to you in due time. For the present, settle down and familiarize yourselves with the city. It is summer. For two months more I will supply food, clothing, and all other necessities. By then you will have adjusted yourselves to the new environment. Then you can begin producing. Making a living, you call it. Then the city will run itself."

I cast my eye over the assemblage, the human bricks which made up the last structure of Utopia.

"This is to be your city. But also that of my hundred robots. Together, you will live a good life."

Utopia had begun!

CHAPTER III

Atomic-power in Utopia

EVENTS crowded one another after this.

In a month, Sam Harley had another

question. He was the understood leader of the people.

"We can't understand how it will work, Adam Link. You have a power-plant ready to run the factories. But there is no source of electricity in this God-forsaken region. Boulder Dam won't run a line up here into nowhere. You've been supplying our homes with current from Diesel-generators. But oil is expensive to bring here, by truck. Shipping coal wouldn't be much cheaper. How can the city support itself, if it can't run its factory economically?"

"Be patient," I admonished. "I'm working on that angle. In the meantime, enjoy the city's recreations, and don't worry."

Harley left dubiously.

My robots, who acted as police and part-time servants, began to report uneasiness among the human population. They wondered if they had been impulsively duped into something that could not work. And perhaps this was all a great hoax, or plot. Maybe the robots were planning some diabolical experiment, with humans as guinea-pigs!

Such thoughts and suspicions began to waft through the city.

"We will have to work harder, Frank Steele," I said to my assistant. "We must finish our last item and install it, before the humans convince themselves this is all a futile dream."

Frank Steele nodded, but often when I turned around, I would find him gone, without a word. In exasperation one night, I sought him out. He was at the top of the Administration Tower—with Eve.

"I need you," I said tersely. "What are you doing here?"

"Don't be such a slave-driver, Adam," Eve spoke up. "Frank only comes up here for relaxation at times, as I do."

I hadn't seen much of Eve, since the humans came. While I labored hermit-like in the lab, it was her job to keep watch over things in the city. The distribution of food, clothing, and settling minor differences between the new inhabitants. A general nursemaid. No small task. I could not blame her for skipping up here at times, to get away from it.

"Relax," Frank Steele said easily to me. "Rome wasn't built in a day, either."

I REALIZED now how I had been driving myself, day and night, inventing and perfecting. I looked out over the city, taking a deep breath mentally.

The view was striking. The city lay under a full moon, glowing softly. The higher spires were hung with lamps, shedding indirect lighting on the streets below. Yes, I had succeeded in making Utopia City the most beautiful on Earth, like an oasis in a world of badly done things. It was an enchanted scene, like some romantic fairy-land from the pages of a gifted pen.

Romantic!

Quite suddenly I realized, too, that Eve had been a little strange to me, the few times she visited the laboratory. She had seen more of Frank Steele than me, for weeks. Did it mean—

But then I mentally kicked myself, and laughed. Jealousy! Was it creeping up in me, a robot, as in any human heart? But no human could be as sure of his mate as I was of Eve. I dismissed the thought.

Before we went below, a drone sounded from the sky. A mail-plane skimmed high, from the north. Suddenly it broke from its straight course, almost like a person passing a queer sight and turning with a gasp. The plane circled a half dozen times, lower and lower, then veered off on its scheduled route.

I smiled. I could just picture the pilot shaking his head and wondering whether to report the incredible sight or not. An amazing, elfin city out in the middle of the desert! He had accidentally swung this way, off his usual course. Maybe his imagination was playing him tricks!

Strange, but no inkling of Utopia City had yet reached the outside world. Or at least no official notice. None suspected its existence except those who had come to see in person—and stayed.

But I knew that soon the world would know. What then? Would we be plagued, pestered, perhaps interfered with?

THE test came the very next day, in response to the mail-pilot's report, undoubtedly. With a scream of sirens, a dozen motorcycles escorted a State Ranger squad up. I met the head official just outside the city. He and his men stared in amazement at the city, where for ages there had been only desolation.

"Just like they all said," the officer muttered. "A city built out in the desert by Adam Link!" Evidently reports had been drifting in and accumulating. He turned

to me. "I'm in charge of the State Rangers of Nevada. What legal right, if any, have you to—to—"

"Mar the scenery?" I said with quiet irony. I held out papers. "This is a 99-year lease, on this section of desert land, granted me by the Federal Bureau of Reclamation."

I had not been so foolish as to ignore the legal aspect. Money had greased many palms of politicians, before I even started. I had not lived among humans for three years, studying their ways, for nothing. I knew how to "get along."

The papers were in order. The ranger grunted, then frowned.

"But you have people here! How do we know what you're doing with them? By God, this can't go on, whatever it is. You can't dabble with human lives. You, a robot!"

I tried to explain.

"Utopia?" he sneered. "Is that what you're trying to do? Won't work. Besides, you robots have some other plan up your sleeve. I've always said, since I heard of you, Adam Link, that you should be destroyed. Robots can't be trusted, that's all. They're bound to become Frankensteins, sooner or later."

Some of my robots had clattered up from the city. They stood in a phalanx beside me. Nervously, the rangers began fingering their holsters and edging away. But the last thing in the world my robots were thinking of was attacking. Like me, they were only amazed, and sad, at this brusque denouncement.

"Leave us in peace," I begged. "We are doing no harm. Besides, the lease—"

"It gives you legal rights to the land," the officer retorted. "But not over humans. I'm taking them out of your hands."

I looked at Eve, brokenly. The forces of law could not be opposed. Was there no escape? Was my dream already a bursting bubble? Was Utopia City, so newly launched, already to blink into failure, to be set alongside Sir Thomas More's imaginary Utopia?

But what could I do against the world which this officer represented?

"How did you force these people here?" the man was asking, shaking his head. "I can't understand it. But anyway, I'll put a quick stop to it. These people have the right to live their own lives—"

"Exactly, mister!"

JED TOMKINS had stepped up, followed by most of the others. He was hardly the Jed Tomkins of two months before. He was clean-shaven, neatly dressed, and twenty pounds heavier. He sent a stream of tobacco-juice in the dirt. That one thing had clung.

"We got the right, as you say, to live our own lives," he went on. "And by Tim, we are! We *want* to live here, in Adam Link's city. He's treating us swell. Better than we ever got treated before in our whole lives. We're staying, see? And you nor all the soldier boys in creation can't take us out."

There was stunned silence for a moment. Then a shout of assent rose from the massed crowd behind. Another man stepped forward. He had formerly been a lawyer, with a slumping practice.

"Ever hear of the Bill of Rights, Mr. Ranger? You can't tamper with that. And if you, or any group, thinks of bringing this up in court, you'll have 5000 adult witnesses testifying against you in the Supreme Court, before we're through. That's how much we want to be *rescued* from the clutches of a Frankenstein robot named Adam Link! Hurray for Adam Link!"

The cry instantly thundered from all their throats. And the cry, I knew, would echo throughout the land.

Utopia was saved.

The rangers, bewildered, turned away like whipped dogs. Their vehicles vanished in the distance.

I turned.

"Thanks, Jed," I said humbly. Humbly, because I realized all the powers and intellect of Adam Link could not have prevailed, if this human and his fellows hadn't saved the day.

"Forget it, Adam," Jed Tomkins returned, embarrassed. "We know you're for us. We know this is our home for life."

Another voice sounded, the rather strident one of Sam Harley.

"But still, how do we know?" he challenged. He had not joined in the cheering. And certain others. "There's still no power-plant to run the factories. We still aren't producing. You've paid the bill on everything so far, Adam Link. When will we have to pay you back—and *how?*"

The listening people fell silent, glancing at each other. It had been growing in their minds, like a poisonous mushroom. The use of the word Frankenstein before

left its lurking echo in the air. What would the dread payment be, if it wasn't money? What monstrous cabal had spawned in the cold minds of the robots who had inveigled 10,000 helpless humans into the middle of a desert?

The atmosphere had quite suddenly changed.

"They're going to murder us!" a hysterical voice rang out. Some human mind had brooded too long. "The robots are going to spill our blood in the sand, in hatred of the human race, and laugh—laugh—"

"Silence!" I thundered, cowing them.

A crisis had again come up, more deadly than the other. "Back into the city, all of you. Go to the power-plant facing Utopia Square. There you shall see what I've prepared for you!"

THEY had to go. My robots, at a signal, had formed a line. Like police, they herded the humans back into the city, down the streets to Utopia Square. They went in stunned, fearful silence. Jed Tomkins looked at me puzzled. Puzzled, but with trust.

The large portals of the power-plant were open. Frank Steele stood framed in the doorway. The people glanced beyond him into the plant—and gasped. The dozen Deisel-generators which had been supplying electricity were dismantled. There would be no current now, to run the city. It had all been an elaborate hoax. The robots would now have their long-planned, insane orgy of tearing human beings to little shreds in their superstrong, merciless metal fingers!

I stepped on a platform, previously erected.

"People of Utopia! You have all been wondering what my final plans were. You have been wondering what will run this city, in terms of dollars and cents. Here is my answer—"

I unveiled a square metal box, two feet high.

"This power-unit," I said, "will give out enough electricity to light every home, work every toaster, iron, household appliance, elevator, electric auto, and factory. And a thousand more, if necessary!"

Sam Harley elbowed forward.

"What, that little box? Come clean, Adam Link, what's your racket? You've got us in your power. What's the bad news?"

He was pale, frightened, waiting as all the rest were to hear some terrible pronouncement, when I was through playing my horrible little game.

I threw a switch on the box. A heavy, insulated cable led indoors to the relay board. The box hummed suddenly, as though filled with a million angry bees. And the crowd jumped back as a rumble sounded from every factory nearby. A thousand dead machines came to life, all fed from this small box-generator.

"What does that box produce" Sam Harley gasped.

"Atomic power!" I said proudly.

Most of them did not understand. But here and there a head shot up. Some of the men had been engineers and scientists, their lives broken by drink, or misfortune, or fate. They knew what it meant. And they would tell the others.

Sam Harley understood.

"Atomic power!" he breathed. "You've accomplished that, Adam Link?"

I nodded.

"Finished it this morning. I worked on it two months. It will run the factories, citizens of Utopia. Its fuel is sand. It will use a ton a year—costing ten cents. This is my gift to mankind!"

Sam Harley was suddenly ashamed. All the human faces back of him were ashamed for their groundless alarm of the hour before.

I stared around.

"I hope you will remember this. Never again mistrust robots, simply because they are monsters to your physical eyes."

PROUDLY I patted the machine, my greatest inventive achievement. It represented the step ahead of present-day cyclotron research, where atomic-power had been released in the laboratory, in minute amounts. I had simply stepped up the quantity to commercial proportions. Man might putter along another century, before duplicating that laborious step.

I spoke again.

"Utopia City is in full swing, from this day on. The factories will now produce. You will each earn your livelihood. But there will be no money involved. Each man—human or robot—is to give five hours of his daily time, attending the machines or related work. When the factories produce, the city will have a gross income. This income will be used to buy

the city's necessities. Food, clothing, and all necessary personal items will be distributed as heretofore—according to *need*. Not according to any scale of who has the most dollars and cents."

I paused, to let that sink in.

"You will each also be entitled to an automobile, television set, and all household appliances, according to families. The city's electrical current is yours to use at any and all times. Among other things, my robots will tomorrow install air conditioning units in every home and building."

All eyes were thankful, as they wiped their foreheads. The desert summer was hot, though the nights were cool.

"You will have much leisure time," I resumed. "I need not mention the various recreational centers, for you have used them —theatres, sport arenas, and libraries. Your children will be taught by robots. There will be classes for adults, too, who wish to further their education."

I was merely sketching the future of life in Utopia. A hundred and one other innovations would be geared in, till it was truly the practical Paradise I visioned. But one more thing I had to impress on them.

"Last, but perhaps most important of all—you are to accept my robots as fellow beings. They will work with you, talk with you, play with you. Side by side, robots and humans will create the better life. In time, Utopia City will dazzle the world, like a diamond in the sordid setting of present-day civilization. We will be the envy of all mankind!"

I waved an arm.

"That is all," I concluded. "I give you—Utopia!"

CHAPTER IV

Adam Link Gets a Medal

SIX months sped by.

Utopia, after its sputtering start, rose smoothly into the sky of history.

The world slowly came out of its somnolence, lifted its head, and listened. What was this busy, humming, happy community out in the wastelands? Who had achieved the good life, when all the rest of the world was wracked with innumerable troubles?

Reporters came first, their noses sniffing out something sensational.

I'll never forget the young man, Pete Crane, who claimed he could find faults in my so-called Utopia. He stood before the city, having just arrived, staring.

"Beautiful, all right—from a distance," he said cynically. "Your Eden, eh? Hm, swell heading—'Adam and Eve Link Build Modern Eden.' But I'll bet you I can find a dozen holes in your set-up. Utopia—bah! Bet you any amount you say, Adam Link."

"Let's say a million dollars," I agreed.

"Make it a hundred," Crane, said hurriedly. "Week's pay. Let's go."

I took him for an auto ride, first, through tree-and-flower lined drives. Another car suddenly came swiftly toward us. It would be a head-on crash! But five feet from us, the other car bounced against our invisible bumper of force. It stopped dead. Our car, too. I explained.

"But why weren't our heads snapped off by the abrupt stop?" Crane asked dazedly. "At least mine, if not your iron one?"

"Molecular deceleration," I said. "Taking up the shock in every atom. There are no auto-accidents in Utopia City. There can be none."

I took him within a building, where cooling drafts of air made him sigh contentedly. An elevator soundlessly took us twenty stories high in three seconds, by anti-gravity. From here we surveyed the city, spread like a fabulous garden-city inhabited by gods. We went through the office buildings, where clerks sat at desks bathed in softened sunlight that came through transparent steel. All were tanned, healthy, in good humor, so unlike the pale, worried, dissatisfied clerks in big cities.

In the spotless factory, spinning looms manufactured a synthetic, plastic cloth of my own invention, far superior to rayon, nylon, or any other artificial thread. It was Utopia City's sole product. In the outside markets it was selling steadily, being softer than silk, practically indestructible, and half as expensive.

In the schools, we listened to children reciting their lesson, under the guidance of robot teachers. Crane grunted a little when a six-year old worked out an algebraic problem, and a teen-age boy worked out the precession of Mercury's orbit by Einstein's Relativity.

After working hours, Crane watched two teams of men play baseball in a huge arena, with an ease and skill of Major League calibre, trained by robots. Wandering on,

music filled the air from large horns at every street corner, stirring symphonies interspersed with light-classical selections and occasional swing. The city itself was noiseless, smokeless, and sparkling with cleanliness.

In the libraries, men and women of all ages browsed through books of proven worth. In corners, humans and robots together gravely discussed the things of life and the universe. Outside the open windows sounded the cries of happy children, playing among the trees.

PETE CRANE said little. At the end of the day, I turned to him.

"Well, Mr. Crane? You may tell me the dozen flaws now, before you leave."

"Leave?" he said. "I'm staying—if I can!"

"Sorry," I had to reply. "There is no room. Perhaps the outside world will copy Utopia City eventually."

"If not, the outside world is plain loco."

He left with the air of a man expelled from Paradise. I had laughingly refused his hundred dollars, on the bet, but I saw his editorial the next day. I had been watching the newspapers avidly, having them delivered at the nearest railroad junction where they were picked up by truck, as with all our supplies.

"Adam and Eve Link have actually achieved a present-day Eden," he wrote. "In plain dollars and cents, his city is run more economically than any city on Earth. The standard of living is higher than for any group of humans in history. Their cost of living, due to advanced scientific and social methods, is ridiculously low. Adam Link is proving to this bad old world that their methods are slipshod, obsolete, and socially criminal.

"Also, at the same time, he is proving that human beings can be uplifted by proper environment. The poor, formerly indifferent wretches that came to him have become energetic, useful, happy citizens. With much leisure time, they are rapidly gaining culture in libraries and classes. Their children play happily in great parks without danger.

"Most amazing of all is the robot feature. They mix with the humans, having long discussions on how best to run the city for the benefit of all. Robots and humans together, they have begun a truly good life. Adam Link has achieved his goal. He has devised a practical Utopia, the dream of mankind for ages! There is no crime in his city. No slums. Not one underprivileged person. Utopia! It is that. There is no flaw in it!"

Was there no flaw in it?

I LEFT the Administration Building one day, to meet Eve at the West school, where it was her delight to teach children.

"She left," I was informed by a loitering tot, "with another can-man." The children, in innocent disrespect, called all robots "can-men," to distinguish them from "real" men.

I drove around the city, at a reckless pace, to find them. Finally, from a tower, I saw them way out in the desert, glinting. I strode out there. It was dusk, with the purples and pastels of sunset fingering over the sand.

They didn't hear me come up.

"Sunset is so lovely out here on the desert," Eve was murmuring.

"You're lovely, too, Eve—mentally!"

My metal feet clinked against a stone. Frank Steele whirled, then stood like a man might, enraged and panting.

"Spying on us?" he snapped.

"Oh, Adam," Eve said. "Why must you be this way? Frank is lonely, naturally. He needs a mental mate. All the robot-men will, eventually, as they see so much of human life. Have you thought of that?"

No, I hadn't. I couldn't blame Frank Steele for the yearnings I had had too, before Eve. The natural urge for a close, intimate companionship of the mind. I had come out with harsh words on my lips. I left without saying a word.

Number Nine met me in the city, with a boy perched on his shoulders, whooping in delight.

"Adam Link!" he hailed. "This little boy asked me to take him home. But I don't know where he lives!"

"Why didn't you ask him?" I demanded irritably, knowing that kindly-souled but somewhat addled Number Nine had silently toted the boy without thinking of asking.

I went to my private office in the Administration Building, from which I handled the multitudinous executive affairs of Utopia City. Utopia? Purgatory, rather, with Eve lost to me. Yes, that was the bitter truth. How had it happened? What should I do?

I was aware suddenly that Number Nine

was in the doorway, watching me.

"Get out of my sight!" I snapped. "Must you always be under my feet? No matter which way I turn, there you are. Go away."

I was taking it out on Number Nine. He didn't go.

"But you are sad," he said. "And when you are sad, I am too—father."

"Father?" I exploded. "I'm not your father."

"You created me," Number Nine returned. "The humans call some father. If you aren't my father, then what are you?"

"Does it matter?" I roared. "Get out of my sight, you poor, dumb, scatterbrained—"

I choked back the rest, when he left, and felt utterly ashamed. Number Nine loved me, in his own way, following me around like a dog. Loved me, as Eve didn't—

Eve appeared suddenly, in the doorway. She gazed at me, with my head in my hands.

"Poor dear," she said softly. "Number Nine was right. You *are* jealous. I'm glad! I did it only to make you jealous! Do you know you hardly noticed me, for weeks and weeks?"

"Eve! I've been so busy—" But I stopped giving excuses, and rectified the matter, high in the tower under the moon. I told her that in all the universe, there could be no love like ours.

There was no flaw in Utopia after all!

AFTER Crane's editorial, the world began to take notice. Adam Link's silly experiment was turning out well. Commissions came from business firms, social societies, and even the government, to observe and take notes. Business men tried to buy my inventions.

"I'm prepared," said one," to write you out a check for one million dollars, for patent rights to the atomic-power process."

I shook my head instantly.

"Ten million!" he offered. "A hundred million!"

I smiled within myself.

"Money isn't used in Utopia City. Besides, if I wished, I could buy *you* out, ten times over."

"But atomic-power! It's the greatest thing since the steam-engine. The world must have it!"

"The world must first prove itself worthy," I retorted, politely but firmly requesting his departure.

But the high spot of it all was when Number Nine, my errand boy, came stumbling in one day.

"Some men to see you," he announced. "Out on the steps."

"On the steps? Why didn't you show them in? I've told you time and again humans must be treated politely. Who are they?"

Number Nine shrugged, rolling his eyes.

"And I've told you over and over to ask who they are!" I scolded him. Sometimes Number Nine really aroused my anger for his sheer dumbness. I was sorry I had created such a miserable specimen of a robot.

I stalked out—and gasped.

The whole thing had been staged, obviously with Eve's connivance. All the human population of the city stood before the building, and my hundred robots. A group of ten men and women stood on the steps.

"We are a committee from the Social Service Society," one man stated.

He strode up to me, and pinned a bronze medal on my chest—or tried to pin it. Eve darted forward, while the crowd chuckled, and hooked the medallion over a rivet-stud, by using all the pressure of her superstrong fingers.

Then the medal blazed out, against my duller body finish.

I was speechless.

Recovering his poise, the man spoke.

"This medal proclaims that one Adam Link, for meritorious social service to humanity, is hereby entered in the Hall of Fame!"

Hall of Fame! My cup was complete. All the trials and despair of the past were over. The world at last accepted Adam Link, the robot, in honor and esteem.

I couldn't say a word. I could only stand, almost trembling, and wish my creator were here beside me, to know that he had not made a mistake, bringing a metal-brain to life. So many times I had thought it a mistake.

When the committee left, I nudged Eve.

"Well, Eve," I couldn't help crowing. "Here's Utopia. You said it wouldn't work."

"I was wrong, Adam, wasn't I?"

It didn't occur to me till later that, like a woman, she had not quite conceded my

victory. Was she reserving judgment till later.

CHAPTER V

Trouble in Utopia

AND suddenly, a cloud settled over the clear horizon.

Sam Harley came in one day, after working hours, with a dozen men behind him.

"Anything wrong?" I asked, seeing his face set in rather grim lines. Usually the humans flocked to the recreational centers and libraries after work. "Is there anything lacking, in the line of amusements? If so, let me know. I'm ready to add anything to make life worth while."

"Yes, there's something lacking, all right," Sam Harley agreed. "And it isn't recreation or reading. We're tired of that. There are more important things in life."

"What?" I was puzzled.

"Government," Harley said succinctly. "*Human* government!"

I felt as though he had thrown a bomb in my face. So far, in Utopia City, there had been no definite "government." Everyone simply worked, and lived, and enjoyed life free from care and worry. I thought it was sufficient. But now, what was this strange attitude voiced by Sam Harley and his followers?

I waited, and he went on.

"I've formed a party. Gaining members, I'm now in a position to form a civic government."

"But I'm the civic government," I remonstrated. "Are you dissatisfied with me?"

"No-o," he drew out the word slowly. "No, not exactly. But it wouldn't be right for you, a robot, to continue as our pseudo-ruler. Give us back our affairs in our own hands."

And then I knew. It was a minor "revolution" for "independence." I could not blame them. The human spirit chafes under imposed "rule." Then I laughed. It really didn't amount to a hill of beans. Let them set up their little "government" and pretend to rule. I would still be the power behind the throne. Or the guiding hand. They were like children.

I gave in, realizing it must be so.

Sam Harley promptly moved into the Administration Building, next to my office. "Mayor of Utopia City" was painted on his door. He apportioned various offices to his followers, and the city government was duly installed. The printing office was ordered to put a headline in the Utopia City News —"Sam Harley Appointed Mayor by Adam Link!"

IT relieved me of many petty details in the running of the city. I had more free time, and dived eagerly into my laboratory work once again. I wanted to add to my roster of inventions that would oil the progress of Utopia City more and more.

"Thomas Edison Link on the job," I told Eve happily. "Mankind has been puttering along, with one foot back in the jungle. The true machine age is around the corner, and with it their pathetic bleat for Prosperity."

Eve seemed thoughtful.

"Maybe you shouldn't have done it, Adam—let Harley become mayor, with all the authority that implies."

"The city practically runs itself," I laughed. "Harley doesn't know it, but he's a figurehead, nothing more."

"Still, human nature—" Eve said vaguely. But I wasn't listening. I was inventing an electric light-bulb that gave off no waste heat.

Number Nine came rushing in, his eye-shutters clicking as his slow-witted brain tried to form words.

"Adam Link!" he finally stuttered. "They're having an argument—the humans! Come and see. It's funny!"

But it wasn't humorous at all. Racing to the Administration Building, I saw the scene on the broad stone steps. Harley and his group, at the top, faced a mob below who were hooting and yelling. It was close to midnight. Why weren't they in bed?

The two groups seemed about to clash. I stepped between. To back me up, several of my all-night robot police arrived from their stations. Frank Steele came running from the power-house where he was chief engineer, watching over the atomic-power unit.

The humans eased back, at this show of authority.

"What is going on?" I demanded.

"I heard threats all day," Harley answered. "I kept my men here tonight, to protect our files. That crazy mob down there wants to wreck my office. But I'm mayor!"

The crowd howled. "We want an election! We want an election!"

"Silence!" I roared. "I don't understand."

Jed Tomkins stepped forward, from the group below.

"It's like this, Adam Link," he explained, while the others quieted. "You set up Sam Harley as mayor. But all the people don't like him as mayor. There should have been an election, like everywhere else in this country!"

Great heavens above! What had I started?

I DECIDED to put a stop to all the foolishness, here and now.

"There won't be a mayor at all," I stated, "since you humans must wrangle over it. I was your mayor, or patriarch, before. I re-install myself. Sorry, Harley, but you may move out tomorrow—"

"Yeah?" Harley drew a paper from his inner clothing and waved it. "You signed this, Adam Link. It officially empowers me as mayor, for one year!"

Yes, I had signed the silly document, without thinking twice. A groan came from the crowd below. Then a shout of rage.

But my answering shout of rage drowned theirs.

"Fools!" My amplified voice beat back from the buildings. "I'll have no more of this. Sam Harley is mayor, since I signed him into that office. But his term is only one year. And he will answer to me for any mismanagement of affairs in Utopia City!"

My voice changed to pleading.

"This is all so unnecessary. Please keep your heads. Remember that you are living a better life here than ever before. Keep it so!"

The logic bit home. The crowd dispersed quietly. Sam Harley ducked back into his office. But I was not so dismayed.

"Just letting off a little steam," I said to my robots. "Humans are like that. When there is no trouble, they try to make it, for a bit of excitement. Tomorrow they'll be as meek as lambs, and laughing over it."

"Strange creatures," Frank Steele mused. "They wish to dominate one another. By the way, is Harley our mayor, too? Yesterday he ordered me to make another atomic-power unit, in case this one breaks down. He put it as a suggestion."

"Ignore the suggestion," I said. "Harley is testing his range of authority. This will all straighten out soon."

I was annoyed at the way Eve glanced at me, and then up at the stars, questioningly.

THE stars looked down, questioningly themselves, in the following weeks.

There was dissension in Utopia!

First of all, a strike was called in Factory One. Jed Tomkins had formed a union. The issue was why Sam Harley and his group should loll in their offices, merely giving orders, when others had to work. Fist-fights occurred.

"Adam, you must do something!" Eve cried. "Utopia is falling apart!"

"Nonsense, Eve!" I said calmly. "It is a good sign, of a healthy, vigorous people. Anyway, nothing in life is faultlessly smooth. The society from which they come is also a vigorous, sometimes bickering democracy. Be patient. Let them get it out of their systems, this quarreling. Remember Utopian life is still new to them. Let them have a bit of the old life, for comparison. Then they'll wake as from a bad dream, and all will be well."

But I was jolted out of this philosophical calm.

Number Nine one day displayed a green piece of paper with scrollwork on it. There was an engraving of myself on one side, Harley on the other, and a large numeral One in the corners.

"Where did you get it?" I rasped.

"From Sam Harley," Number Nine said. "I ran an errand for him, and he said, here's a tip. He called it money. Just think, Adam, with this I can buy a big meal anywhere in town!" He grunted, then. "Wait, I don't need food! Was Harley laughing at me, like everybody else?"

Money!

The word was like a falling mountain. I raced up the Administration steps with such speed that chips of stone flew under my heel-plates. I yanked the door nearly off its hinges.

Harley sat with stacks of green paper before him, marked in ones, fives, tens and twenties. He looked up.

"Hello, Adam. Now don't get excited. Sure this is money, printed by myself. Did you think you could run the city forever without it? Nice theory, working in brotherhood and all that, but you need a

fundamental basis for exchange of goods."

He watched me carefully, trying to read my reaction. But I was just unmoving metal to him, as expressionless as a statue.

"Do you like your picture on it?" he finished lamely.

"Yes," I said. Even he was surprised. I let him think that I was flattered over the inscription under my picture—"Adam Link, great founder of Utopia City."

"You're right, Harley," I said. "We do need currency to keep the economic machinery oiled and going."

Let them get *that* out of their systems, too.

Harley grinned in pleasure.

"Now we're getting somewhere, Adam. Between you and me we'll get Utopia City on a solid, real foundation. Your other system was only temporary. All the people are realizing that, gradually."

I left, grinning also within myself. Give a man enough rope and he'll hang himself. That was the way to do it. Let the mayorship, spawned from the old system of the outer world, smell to high heaven. When it fell, it would bury with it all future dabbling in "politics." Then Utopia would take its second wind, and climb the heights.

After all, the end was worth the means. So the mind of Adam Link reasoned, in this new crisis.

CHAPTER VI

Revolt in Utopia!

SUSPENSE hung like a dark cloud over Utopia City.

More strikes occurred, against the regime in power. Harley struck back. He instituted "wages" for all labor, and withheld funds from the strikers. He clamped down on the free distribution of food and clothing, deliberately underfeeding the strikers, since they had no money with which to "buy."

Jed Tomkins led a mob to the food warehouse, and broke in. Rioting resulted. For twenty-four hours, holding the warehouse, Jed Tomkins set himself up as mayor, by accord of the majority. Harley set fire to the place, driving the short-lived rival government out.

I called my robots to put out the fire. They waded into the burning building, stamping and beating, and put the final embers out with water. No other building was endangered, as no buildings in Utopia were near one another.

But I forbade my robots to interfere in the human doings. They looked on in utter amazement.

"They'll pull the city down over their ears!" Frank Steele gasped. "All humans are mad!"

"Adam! Adam!" Eve almost sobbed. "What are you doing? This will end in catastrophe!"

I was saddened and dismayed myself. The humans were engaged in a tug-of-war for power. They were back at their old game of seeking privileges, not satisfied with just living and enjoying a better life than anywhere on Earth.

Could it go on? While I had ruled, all was well. Now Utopia was fast becoming a cess-pool of maladjustment and struggle. Even the gardeners, whose duty it had been to keep the city parks in trim, shirked. The city was beginning to look shoddy.

"But still we must wait patiently," I told my restless, wondering robots. "They will come to their senses, of their own will. Utopia will rise from these ashes, stronger and better for it."

Words of wisdom? Or words of utter folly?

I KNEW the answer one day, when Frank Steele stalked into my laboratory.

"Adam Link, if you don't do something, I will! Harley today demanded that I make another atomic-power unit, and make a complete set of blueprints for him. I refused. He threatened then to see that no oil was available to the robots, for our body-parts. Now that's the last straw. These humans must be put in their place."

It was the last straw—almost.

"Easy, Adam!" I told myself as I marched to Harley's office. "Anger won't help."

I was reasonably calm when I faced Sam Harley, mayor of Utopia City.

"Sure," he admitted readily. "I want the blueprints of the atomic-power unit. It's the greatest thing in commercial history. We'll patent atomic-power, and make a gigantic fortune. If we handle it right, we can even become the industrial captains of Earth!"

What madness had spawned in his mind? I answered patiently.

"But why do that? You are living a good, clean, abundant life. You need noth-

ing. You can't gain anything by simply amassing a fortune. You can't live a better life with all the gold on Earth. Don't you see, Harley?"

He turned a deaf ear.

"Don't be childish, Link. This is the opportunity of the ages. Are we going to sit here like monks in a monastery, when we have the chance to really put Utopia City on the map? Why, we can manufacture the units right here, hold the monopoly, and make this the center of all Earth industry. Now tell me, am I right?"

"You're right, as far as that goes," Frank Steele put in. "Oil, coal, and all present methods of producing power in the world would be obsolete the moment atomic-power was introduced."

"There you are!" Harley said triumphantly. "Your own man admits it, Link. Now let's not waste time. How soon can you have the blueprints for me, Adam?"

"The day after eternity ends," I said quietly.

"But Link, you must—"

"No!"

I thundered the word this time, so that the windows rattled.

"You've revealed yourself as completely incompetent, unworthy, and ruthless, Sam Harley. I hereby declare your government illegal. I will resume rule, since you humans are too blind and stupid to rule yourselves properly. I gave you all the leeway I possibly could, hoping you would merit your office. Instead, you've cracked the foundations of Utopia. This is my city. I will run it!"

I had finally put my foot down.

"The paper you signed!" Harley screeched. "How can you take back rule, against your pledged signature?"

"By the right of might," I roared, "the only method you understand. Now get out!"

To help him, I caught him by the collar and deposited him outside the door. I put my metal fist through the glass-panel on which was his name, as mayor. I kicked his desk to pieces and stamped his papers to shreds.

Only then did the red rage in my brain clear away.

I turned as Eve and other robots dashed up.

"We're taking over the city," I commanded. "Destroy all money. Ban all strikes. Police all streets, day and night. What a fool I was to let them play at their mad little games, like vicious children. By tomorrow, we will have Utopia again."

BUT Utopia was not back the next day. Or the next, or next. Was it too late? Had the seed of destruction been sown?

Harley had left, muttering threats. The threats materialized. Robots were stoned, wherever they appeared. What wild story Harley succeeded in telling, I don't know. Perhaps that I had threatened to make them slaves. The people, inflamed by the recent release of their darker passions, were fertile ground for any tall tale that stigmatized the robots.

Curiously, the two human factions that had so recently been bitter antagonists united against us. Robots were the common enemy of mankind.

I tried to call a meeting in Utopia Square, to lay the ghost. The people refused to congregate, stoning robots sent after them from gangways and windows. I commanded my robots not to touch a human. One death or injury, even by sheerest accident, would brand us forever as Frankensteins.

"What can we do?" Eve cried. "Utopia is crumbling!"

I groaned, for she was right. My Eden had become Hell. Utopia had become wicked Babylon!

Desperately, I had my robots take over the power-plant, and shut off power. I would use human methods. I would let them feel the pinch of poverty and want they formerly had.

With power off, all the machinery in the city stopped. All radios, autos, air-conditioning units, cooking stoves. Life for humans would be unbearable in a few days. Then they would see their folly, and come around to me.

Instead, they tried leaving. With no vehicles available, some families began tramping out into the desert. They would die before they had gone half-way to safety under the burning sun. I sent my robots to carry them screaming and bawling back into the city. It only added fuel to their hatred.

The situation had gone from bad to worse. All the human population were our bitter enemies now. All except one.

Jed Tomkins came limping up to me, thinner, haggard, not even chewing tobacco.

"Adam Link, I'm your friend," he said.

"I still believe in you. But it's all a mess now. God, what an awful mess! Harley, after you kicked him out, convinced the others that you had sworn to kill the whole human race—all over Earth! That you and your robots had finally turned Frankenstein. I tried to talk them out of it. Told them it was ridiculous. They beat me—"

He fell in a dead faint. He was horribly bruised. Eve knelt to attend to him, with a first-aid kit.

The rest of my robots looked at one another, sadly,—and angrily. Sad that humans could be so wrong-minded. Angry at being branded as Frankensteins.

"They cast stones at us!" Frank Steele muttered. "They turned against us, forgetting all we did for them. They blame us for all their self-started troubles. For two cents I'd—"

"Silence!" I snapped, especially as some of the other robots were muttering, too. "Forgive them, don't condemn them. There's still hope for Utopia. Maybe in a few days they'll listen to reason."

CHAPTER VII

War in Utopia!

WE waited. We held the heart of the city, the downtown section. They were in the residential sections. Would they think better of their folly, and send a delegation to us, to talk things over? I found myself praying, to the High Powers of the universe who watched over humans and robots alike. Praying that I had not once again brought down the name Frankenstein on the robot race.

I was alone in my office. I had sent Eve away, wishing solitude.

I was aware suddenly that I heard her voice, low and distant. In the quiet, shutdown city, sounds carried well. It came from the tower, above.

"No, Frank," she was saying. "You mustn't talk that way. Adam will think a way out."

I had experienced all human emotions before. Jealousy, recently. Now it crept over me like a black tide. I made my way swiftly but silently up the steps, and peered out on the tower balcony, below which the city was spread. Again there was a full moon, overhead.

And two glinting metal bodies close together, talking.

"I hate to say this, Eve. But I think your Adam is going to pieces. What's more, I think he mismanaged the whole business from the start—letting Harley go on till he smashed things. Adam ruined Utopia!"

Eve jerked back.

"Don't say such horrid things, Frank! It's not true."

"Come, come," Frank Steele snapped. "Adam botched up the whole robot problem from the start. From the day he was created. You can't reason with humans. They are imbeciles. But they can be handled easily—in a way *I've* figured out!"

"What do you mean?" Eve asked, startled.

Steele's microphonic voice changed to a sort of husky rumble.

"I mean that I love you, Eve! Leave Adam. Come with me. Together we'll rule humans. Many of the robots are with me. Eve—"

IT was like a rifle shot. Eve's hand swept around, slapping Steele's metal cheek with a ringing clang. Eve is mentally a human girl. It was natural for her to do what she did, as any flesh-and-blood girl would.

"Beast!" she hissed. "I love Adam, as I will to the end of time!"

My thoughts were curious, at the moment. Dr. Charles Link had fashioned a being of metal—but one that acquired human emotions. Even they mighty emotion of love. More than once it had manifested itself. A human girl had once fallen in love with me, a metal man. Also a metal girl. But for the first time, this triangle had come up. A metal man striving for Eve's love.

"What!" Frank Steele seemed entirely taken aback. "You lie! All those hours we spent together—"

"Were only to make Adam jealous," Eve told him bitingly. "You mean nothing to me, Frank Steele."

He stood for a moment, rocking. A robot's alloy face shows no emotion, but I could feel the frustrated rage fuming in his mind. He leaped at her, arms upraised for smashing blows.

I leaped quicker. I dealt him a staggering blow at the side of the head. He stumbled back, then whirled like a beast at bay. With insane fury, he came at me.

My own robot attacking me! Not mov-

ing, I looked at him—this being I had created. This being who had—by the mockery of fate—become *my* Frankenstein monster! Appropriate, indeed, had been the name he chose for himself—"Frank! Short for Frankenstein, you know!"

Still couldn't believe it.

"Stop!" I said. "I forgive you your words, Steele. You didn't really mean them. We've all been a little upset lately—"

For answer, he dove at my legs. I was taken unawares. I toppled backwards, smashing through the light grill railing of the balcony. I fell twenty stories, with Eve's scream ringing in my ears.

The universe seemed to explode in one rending crash, as I struck the pavement—*head-first!* The second before my mind blinked out, I knew that I would never awaken again. For my iridium-sponge brain would be crushed to atoms.

THEN how was it that my brain again blinked into being?

That was the question I asked myself, as I opened my eyes and realized I was alive. Eve stood over me, and a group of other robots. How long had I been unconscious?

"Thank Heaven you've come to, dear!" Eve half sobbed. "Ten, long, terrible hours I've waited!"

"Ten hours?" I said. "But what saved me? I landed on my head."

"Number Nine," Eve said. "He was below the tower, looking up and watching. He caught you. Saved you from smashing to the pavement itself. As it was, the jolt knocked your electron-center dead for ten hours."

I bounced up, with no more than a few dents in my body, and my head a little twisted to the side from a loose neck cable.

"Where's Number Nine" I asked gratefully.

The robots hung their heads.

"He fell back so hard from cushioning your fall," Eve said in a low voice, "that his head cracked against the stone. His brain—"

She didn't have to say it. His iridium-sponge must be sprayed over a ten-foot circle, as mine would have been. I hung my head, too, honoring the passing of Number Nine. For once in his short, bewildered life he had thought quickly—and beat the swiftest of all foes, Death. For me! And so many times I had shouted at him, scolded him—

Useless recriminations, now.

"Frank Steele?" I demanded. "Where is he. We have a little unfinished business—"

I stopped and went cold. Why were the robots fidgeting nervously? Why was Eve looking at me in stark horror?

"Adam," she said, "prepare yourself. After Steele threw you down, he thought you were dead, as we all did. He came below and proclaimed himself the new robot leader. He announced his plan—to rule Earth! When he left, sixty of the robots followed him. Forty of us stayed behind. Then we found you alive."

I digested what I had heard. Steele leading sixty robots in a war against the human race! I had to stop it.

"Where is he?"

"At the power-house."

"Come."

WE marched to the power-house. A robot sentry was on the steps outside, but more to guard against human intervention than robots. He stared at me, in the lead, then darted within.

Frank Steele emerged a second later, all his robots at his back. His amazement at seeing me alive was great, but controlled.

I explained in brief phrases.

"Now," I said, "your short reign is over. And for what you spoke, I sentence you to death. You men back of him—grab him! Deliver him to me."

But not robot moved, back of him.

"They accept me as leader, Adam," Steele crowed, "whether you are dead or alive. They believe, as I do, that you are a has-been. And that robots have only one place in the world of humans—as rulers!"

I forgave them, the robots who had listened to such words, even as he spoke. They had seen the worst of human nature, recently. They had seen the humans foolishly trample their own Paradise into the dirt. Small wonder that they believed now robots must rule these pitiful beings.

"Listen to me, all of you!" I spoke in stentorian volume. "You will never succeed. Mankind, when aroused, is a formidable enemy. You will build a vast robot army, yes. But cannon will mow you down. When you try to build more robots, laughing, you will find them choking off your metal supplies. Long before you defeat their armies, they will think of a thousand things to try. It won't work, I tell you—"

"Of course not, that way," Steele laughed. "You underestimate my intelligence, Adam Link. There is only one way to win over humans—by the power of money! Beat them at their own game. We will manufacture atomic-power units, and sell them. We will build the industrial army that Sam Harley dreamed of. As sole builders of the atomic-power units, robots will be the money-kings of Earth!"

Madness? No. It could work that way. Frank Steele's penetrating mind had evolved the one plan that could win Earth. As industrial dictator, Steele would have the human race under his thumb.

And dictatorship, of all possible things, was the last course in the world I wanted robots to follow.

"I denounce you as a traitor to our robot race, Frank Steele!" I said. "This is an ultimatum—I give you one hour in which to think better of your ruthless scheme."

I TURNED away, my forty faithful robots following. I waited at the Administration Building.

"What if he doesn't back down?" Eve asked.

I made no answer. I hated to even think of it.

Fifty-nine minutes went by, with agonizing slowness. I arose, to lead my robots to —battle!

Even as the word flashed in my mind, the battle began. Frank Steele had attacked! His robots came crashing into our midst, swinging huge iron clubs. Three of my men went down with smashed brains before we knew what had happened.

"Fight, men!" I yelled. "Fight for your lives—and the future of the robot race!"

You will never know what effort it took to give that order—commanding my robots to fight their brothers. It was the first time robots were battling—against each other.

To me, at that moment, the universe seemed to give a cry of horror.

But, to be more realistic about it, it was self-defense.

My men sprang into action, with their steel fists. I snatched up a metal chair and smashed it down on a raiding robot, steeling my soul. His alloy skull cracked apart and shreds of his iridium-sponge flew through the air. I stared for a long second at his fallen, useless body. I had given him life. And I had taken it away. I felt like a father killing his own child.

But the other thought tore my soul more —civil war among the robots! It had happened, for all the preaching I had done against humans for their folly of warfare.

CHAPTER VIII

Utopia Falls

WAR it was, and perhaps a stranger, more furious struggle than humans could ever know. Steel men against steel men, each with superhuman strength. Powers were let loose against which no human army could have stood a moment. Yet there were no guns.

We were still in the large lobby of the Administration Building, where Frank Steele thought to corner us and finish us off. He had sent his whole force to win in one stroke—or had he?

Edging back, and rapidly counting, I saw there were only eighty robots in the melee. Steele had sent forty against our forty. Out of a sense of fair-play? No, not him! Where was he, and the other twenty? What plan—

Suddenly the attackers turned and fled, in a body, leaving nine dead. We stood bewildered at the sudden end of hostilities. But only for a moment.

"Quick!" I commanded. "Out the back way!"

We clattered from the building, just as it came down with a resounding crash! If we had remained within another second, we would be buried under tons of steel and concrete.

I saw what had brought the building down. Off at the other side, beyond the heap, stood the twenty missing robots. But not the robots they had been an hour before. Each had exchanged his manlike body for a workman-body. As when we had built the city, they had rivet-hands, saw-arms, crane appendages, and all the other varieties. These bodies had been stored away, when the construction was done, for future expansion of the city. Frank Steele had taken them from storage, along with the special heavy-duty batteries needed for the increased horsepower.

How diabolically clever Steele had been!

While his forty robots engaged us, the terrific clatter had cloaked their weakening of the building. The workmen bodies had swiftly wrenched out a cornerstone here, a

strategic beam there, an important key-support elsewhere. Then the crane and tractor men had exerted their full powers, pushing and yanking and pulling against the building till it cracked apart like a half-sawed plank.

Steele saw that he had failed to crush us under the collapsed ruin. He leaped to the top of the pile and gazed down at us on the other side.

"I've declared war on you, Adam Link! I won't rest till I've destroyed you and all your robots—except Eve. Come on, men!"

They came running for open attack. I calculated the chances. Our 38 against their 52, the odds now stood. No chance for us, in hand to hand battle. I gave the order and we retreated. Or rather we ran—and scattered. We lurked behind hedges and trees in the wide park space. Steele sent his men to ferret us out.

A swift arm swinging a metal club wrenched from park benches—a microphonic groan—the metallic clang of a lifeless metal body falling as junk. Indian fighting. Ambush. It was my only chance.

Steele lost three men that way, pursuiting us into the park, till he thought better of it. He called them off. They congregated beyond the park and headed back for the power-plant. There Frank Steele would hatch other plans to wipe us out.

I CALLED my men around me, in the respite. I pointed to where groups of humans, here and there, peered from a distance, having watched this battle of giants.

"We must get them out of the city," I said. "Frank Steel will trample them down in his eagerness to get us. Besides, it is not well for humans to see robots warring."

Besides that, they were only too willing to leave—to get away from these metal warriors who would stamp humans flat if they got in the way. By a grapevine that rustled through their residential section, they heard of the trucks being brought out of garages, that would bear them to safety. Run by gasoline rather than electric power, the trucks were not stalled as all else in Utopia City was.

All night long my robots drove back and forth, delivering humans within walking distance of the railroad junction which was our nearest contact with the outside world. Frank Steele did not bother us. Night battling was out of the question.

At dawn, Utopia was empty of humans.

Sam Harley and Jed Tomkins were in the last truck to leave.

"Utopia, bah!" Harley said in parting. "I knew it wouldn't work. Shouldn't have been fool enough to come, in the first place. Utopia, bah!"

"Shut up," Jed Tomkins snapped. "If anybody ruined it, you did." He turned to me. "So long, Adam Link. Thanks for trying. I'm going to watch the papers. If you ever advertise again, I'll be back!"

The truck vanished into the night. I turned back to Utopia City. I think I laughed, in a grinding sort of way.

Utopia City was a battleground, now. A trampled Eden. Paradise Lost.

I WILL try to give a clear picture of what has been entered in my private journal of robot history as the First Robot War. And I hope the last.

To force our faction to face his superior force, Frank Steele had his workmen contingent systematically raze the city. We woluld have no hiding places, for a drawn-out defense. Starting at one end of town, they began leveling building after building.

The robots had been builders, a few months before. Now they became wreckers. And they worked with appalling swiftness. Houses and towers toppled like ten-pins. Soon the downtown section began to go, its greater structure measuring their length with thunderous crashes, as the metal termites undermined their foundations.

Utopia City melted before our eyes, into dusty heaps of utter ruin.

"Oh, Adam!" Eve moaned. "It was so beautiful, so wonderful. Can't we stop them?"

I tried, in several desperate ways.

Gathering the trucks, we stormed down on them like a panzer division, trying to run them over, machine against machine. In counter-attack, Frank Steele sent his men out in the electric autos. He still had the atomic-power unit in operation, feeding them ether-borne power.

With full speed, the little cars rammed into our trucks, smashing them. Robots jumped out of the combined wreckage, to come at each other hammer-and-tongs. Again, in the equality of hand-to-hand struggle, I could not win. And his cranemen, picking off a man of mine here and there, would grip them in their long pincers, swing them around, and hurl them high in the air to land as utter debris.

I lost ten more men, to their seven, before I withdrew.

I next tried bombarding the wrecking crew, as they worked on the side of buildings, exposed. My robots hurled great stone blocks, to dislodge them. Frank Steel sent out a covering force, and their barrage of concrete bombs rained back at us. Again I had to withdraw.

I tried burning them out, setting flame to park trees when the wind was right. The wall of fire swept to the building they were demolishing. Eager tongues of flame licked at them, but it only served to weaken the building faster. The wrecking robots were unharmed except for an oxide coating on their metal bodies.

UTOPIA CITY came down stone by stone.

In one day, it was more than three-quarters razed. I knew that at the next dawn, Frank Steele would have me cornered. He would level the last few structures, and then I would have to face him in the open, either at the city-site or out on the desert.

One building still stood, in the desolate center of town—the power-plant. Within was the undamaged atomic-power unit. Frank Steele must be still working on the blue-print, before he destroyed the only existing model. With the blueprints, after victory over me, he could build a new city —Robot City, center of robot dictatorship.

All night long I stared at the building, symbol of the greatest achievement of Adam Link, inventor.

I laughed harshly. Symbol of Utopia's fall!

At dawn I spoke to my remaining 25 robots.

"This will be our last stand, men. We are outnumbered. Fight as you've never fought before. If we die, we have died nobly!"

As the gray of dawn burst into red glare, the enemy appeared. A grim, silent, formidable phalanx of 45. We took our stand in the open. No use to run.

The two lines came to grips, with a resounding clash, like two lines of armored knights of Medieval times. Robot fought robot, with mighty metal clubs no human could have lifted. A battle of metal Sampsons, before which the mightiest dinosaurs of a past age might have fled, screaming in terror.

The din must have reverberated as distant thunder far out into the desert. Gears clashed, cogs whined, wheels spun screechingly as the full mechanical powers of Herculean machine-men were exerted. Rivets, bolts, springs, cracked body-plates flew for yards as the club blows took toll. Often a robot would fight as he went down piecemeal. An arm shattered, and he would use his other arm. His side ripped out, he would turn his protected side. A leg off, he would hop. Both legs off, he would wield his club from a lying position till finally his antagonist battered his remaining arm to shreds. Then, at last helpless, he would await the final blow—to his brain.

Even the legendary gods, with their thunderbolts, might have stumbled away in fear, to let these metal colossi alone.

Curiously, the rangers came, rather than gods. The departed people must have entered an alarm. Sirens screaming, squad cars and motorcycles roared up—but unheard. Unheard, the head officer shouted for us to stop. They emptied their pistols at us—unheard. Then, after one good look, they turned and fled again, shaken to the roots of their souls.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw them go, these humans who had witnessed a sight unparalled in history. They would laugh, if they ever saw humans fight, and think again of this titanic battle that shook the very Earth.

I turned back.

Each time a robot fell, whether enemy or ally, I groaned. For this I had created them—to smash each other's skulls open like savage beasts.

"Come, Eve," I said brokenly, pulling her away. We had fought only in defense, Eve and I, withholding death-blows. We had created them, Eve and I.

WE slipped back, skirting a ruin. The battleground blocked out to our eyes, but the furious din, like ten thousand machines whining and roaring and thundering, followed us relentlessly.

"We're leaving?" Eve gasped. "But Frank Steele will win!"

I shook my head, as we reached my laboratory-ruin. Steele had demolished it first, lest I made some instrument of destruction as a weapon.

"Help me clear the center space," I said. "Hurry!"

In an hour, between us, we had shoved

broken stone and debris aside. A trap-door flush with the floor was exposed. I jerked it up, and we slipped into a tunnel. The battle-sounds faded, where the last few of my men—judging by the decreased volume—were staving off final extinction.

Then all was silent, as we ran as fast as we could in utter darkness.

"What is this tunnel?" Eve asked, astonished.

"Number Nine and I built it secretly, from my laboratory to the power-house, at odd times," I told her. "Dips down through bed-rock. Easy to drill it out, with the atom-crushing hammers I invented for excavation work. I never did quite trust Frank Steele. I wanted quick access to the power-plant any time grave emergency arose. This is the emergency. If the power-house isn't too well guarded, we have a chance—"

We sped under the battleground, under the city, to the power-house in the center. If we had tried the same route above, Steele's men would have spied us and given chase.

The tunnel sloped up, under the power-house floor. I pushed up the trap-door set unnoticed in a supply room. We tip-toed to the door and looked out into the main room. Frank Steele was there, as I expected, busily working over the blueprint with two other robots.

He looked out of a window.

"Isn't that battle over yet?" he said impatiently. "I won't feel easy till they bring Adam Link's smashed head to me."

I leaped out.

"Here's my head, Frank Steele!" I roared. "I'm delivering it in person!"

I bounded at them, taking full advantage of the surprise. I had picked up a steel beam in the supply room, ten feet long. I swung this in a whistling arc. It came down on the foremost robot's head, splitting him from head to pelvis, spraying wheels and wires through the air.

One out of action.

THE other robot ran aside, to escape me, with Eve after him. I faced Frank Steele. I swung my great bludgeon again.

But recovering, Steele had had time to snatch up a similar steel bar from his desk, evidently kept on hand for protection. He swung his. The two metal clubs banged together. Again and again we wielded our clubs, each striving to catch the other before he could parry.

Frank Steele was as quick and strong as myself, and with equal mental reflexes. For long seconds we ferociously, silently, battered at one another. Glancing blows landed. I caught Steele on the shoulder, ripping rivets and plates away. Steele stove in my left side, failing only by a millimeter from smashing my main electrical distributor.

Our steel clubs became twisted and cracked. One of my blows finally knocked his away, but at the same time, mine shivered apart. I threw the useless stump at him. He dodged. We came at each other with alloy fists, delivering blows that would have knocked an elephant fifty feet back with a spine broken throughout its length.

We fought on, like metal gladiators who never tired, never weakened. How could I win? I had received some damage, in the previous battling with his men. Frank Steele was fresh, whole, except for what damage I had inflicted, returned in kind. He had the advantage, in the long run.

I prayed for a break. It came.

In a split-second silence, while we fell back from each other, no sound drifted in from outside—from the other battleground.

"We've won!" Frank Steele shouted triumphantly. "My men destroyed your last robot, Adam Link. My men are coming to help me now—"

The blow that landed squarely in his face, while he was off-guard, might have dented the side of a battleship. It completely shattered my arm, as sections of steel telescoped and fell apart. But it also cracked Frank Steele's skull. The iridium-sponge within ripped apart from its anchorage, bringing to him the blankness of non-existence.

His eye-mirrors reflected a stunning surprise. Then they clicked shut limply. His metal body stood a moment, swaying. There was a metallic click inside, as mechanisms all ground to a stop. Then the alloy corpse sprawled full length on the floor, with a disphan clatter.

I stared down. The first Benedict Arnold of the robot race was dead.

I turned.

Eve was sitting on top the fallen form of the third robot, which lay with its head twisted off its neck-piece, from Eve's hammerlock and wrench. She was staring down at the blank eye-mirrors. And weeping within. A mental woman, Eve could not

kill without utter remorse.

I grabbed her hand and yanked her erect.

"Frank Steele's remaining men are coming. Quick! Into the tunnel."

I remained only to set a series of switches on the control-board of the atomic-power unit. Then I jerked down a master switch that would feed sand-fuel into the disintegration chamber at a mounting rate. When the excess loads of released energy began to seek escape—

I leaped into the tunnel after Eve. We raced down into it, for fifteen seconds.

Then we were knocked flat. The ground around us trembled like jelly, followed by a deafening blast of sound. The tunnel walls gave way, showering down tons of rock. We were buried.

TWENTY-FOUR hours later, we had dug our way out. The force of the blast had been cushioned enough, in our refuge, to merely bury us without crushing our bodies flat.

We emerged into sunshine at the bottom of a wide, shallow pit in the desert floor. It was five miles wide, created by the greatest explosion in human history. A pound of matter had burst into pure energy, like a blast of super-dynamite.

We climbed wearily to the crater's rim, and strode out into the desert. We looked back.

Not one stick or stone—or atom—of Utopia City remained.

It was all in limbo now. My hopes and dreams. My brave Number Nine. My Frankenstein. My Eden. It was all behind me, lost forever in a strange combined memory of nightmare and Paradise.

"You were right, Eve," I said. "Utopia is a dream toward which men must work—but never achieve. Perhaps it is best so—as a shining, glorious goal that guides like a light and never goes out."

"Oh, Adam!" Eve sobbed. "I'm so sorry—for you. You tried so hard against the impossible!"

I shrugged.

"Amen," I sighed in resignation. "Adam Link will have to content himself with lesser experiments."

« SOME THOUGHTS ON TIME »

Time is neither short nor long, it being a relative term in our everyday life. Time cannot and does not pass. It is present everywhere. Yet our every action is dependent upon it. Nothing we do can escape the immutable presence of time.

What, then, is time? Under the theory of Einstein, Time, joined with Space, is the elusive Fourth Dimension. Which is meaningless to most of us.

Newton defined Time as "measured duration." We commonly define it as "the elapsing spaces or periods between successions of events." Twenty-three centuries ago, Aristotle recognized that the sole measurer of Time is Motion, therefore it is the three well-known planetary bodies, the sun, the moon, and our own Earth who play the greatest roles in determining the passage of Time and furnish our imaginations with yardsticks by which elapsing spaces can be measured and divided into Calendar Time.

Thus, although we do not think of it, the science of astronomy plays a constant and extremely important part in our daily lives. Not one action but it is measured by an astronomer. He says to us: "That act took you so-and-so-many minutes, days, weeks, years."

Go out and look at the stars. They are Time's sentinels, and as you look at them, realize that, to all intents and purposes, they *are* Time.

And what could be more tangible than that?

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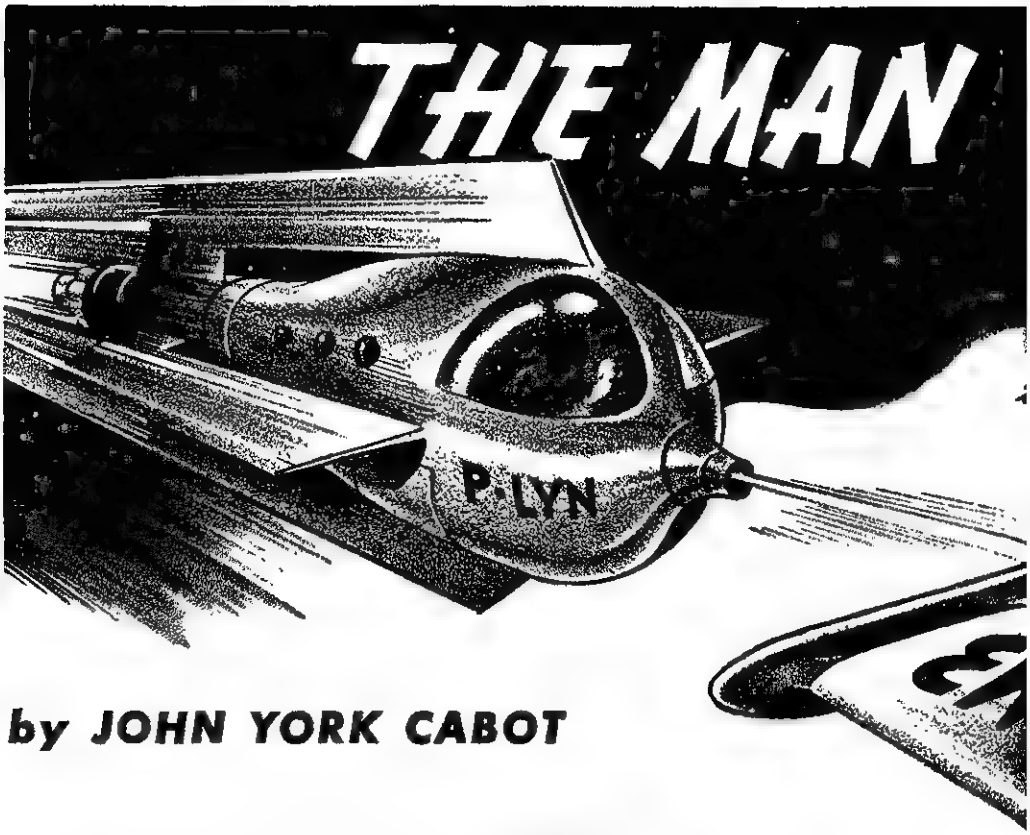


by JOHN YORK CABOT

It's bad enough to be attacked by pirates in space, but when the result is complete amnesia, and you are accused of treachery you can't remember, it's worse.

"THREE hours more," Johnny Deming told himself, "and I'll be easing into the Earth landing base!"

The words brought a grin to his face. That meant he'd be seeing Kay Winters. Which was one reason to be glad this damned run was over.

The other was less pleasant. It would be a relief to turn the papers over to Captain Winters, her father . . . it'd be father-in-law before long! . . . and unload the ticklish responsibility that went with them.

Kay Winters; what a gal! Enough to fire the blood of a Venusian Fishman. . .

Abruptly Deming's smile of anticipation faded. He stared into the visaboard on the instrument panel. Six hundred meters off the port beam of his ship a bullet-like black space cruiser was bearing down on him!

"What the he—" Deming began. Then the muscles in the corners of his jaw went taut. The black space cruiser had wheeled off on a sudden tangent, and was now moving parallel with his own ship.

Wordlessly, Deming reached forward to the instrument panel and set the charges on the atomic cannons in the nose of his craft. There was no reason in the world for another space vessel to be within ten void miles of his ship. Unless it meant trouble.

Deming could see that the black cruiser was one of those super-powered jobs.

With cannon blasting, the pirate ship bore down on Deming's ship—and hell broke loose!

There wouldn't be any chance of making a run for it. He'd be too easily overtaken. Deming switched on his communications mike, connecting with the rear quarters of his small ship. Three other Space Patrol officers were back there—geared for just such an emergency as this.

"Black cruiser off our port beam!" he announced. "Get the guns ready."

The black cruiser was edging in closer, closer, until he could see the entire length of its starboard side. It carried no Federation markings.

Deming set the automatic-control lever on his instrument panel. The ship would now travel dead into the Earth landing base, piloted or not. Then he turned his attention to the atomic cannons.

There was a sudden, blinding flash of orange flame, and the tiny space ship shook like a leaf in a gale. The black cruiser had sent a burst across the bow of Deming's ship.

Deming had been thrown to the floor by the blast. And he picked himself up now, cursing savagely, blood trickling from the corner of his mouth. Frantically, he tried to line the atomic cannons on the belly of the black cruiser, which had now veered sharply across his bow.

But the cruiser flashed by before he could train his lenses.

He wished for a swift moment that Captain Winters hadn't insisted that they carry the papers in an inconspicuous, ordinary commercial-run space ship. You couldn't give much fight in a ship of this type. But, then, secrecy had been the most important part of the plan. And Winters had figured that they'd stand a better chance this way—even though he'd made provisions for a slip in the plan, by placing three Patrol officers in the rear quarters and mounting guns there.

And those rear guns were working well, Deming suddenly realized, for the black space cruiser was playing far wide of their tail, working around for another blast at their nose.

Deming had the lenses lined now, and his mouth was a taut slash as he waited for the black cruiser to flash by the sights of his atomic cannons.

A second blinding burst of orange flame rocked the space ship. The black cruiser had dived swiftly from above, on an in-angle, staying clear of the rear guns and Deming's atomic cannons. The concussion was terrific. The hit was direct. The verelium walls of the pilot's compartment were heated white hot by the burst. Deming was thrown face downward, stunned.

DESPERATELY, he clawed his way to his feet, staggering out of the inferno that was now the pilot's compartment. Dazedly, he made his way back to the rear of the ship—to the quarters where the other three Space Patrolmen were working the other guns.

But the three were standing beside the chamber entrances, atomic pistols drawn, faces tense. And Deming saw why. Their atomic cannons, too, had been rendered useless by the skillful shooting of the black cruiser!

"Out of commission," Deming blurted. "Yours, too, eh?"

One of the three, Des Talcott nodded.

"They'll be boarding us in another few minutes, Johnny."

Deming drew his own pistol, stepping beside his three comrades.

"They'll be trying to," he agreed, and his eyes went to the chamber entrances through which the raiders would force their way.

A sharp jarring indicated that the black cruiser was now alongside.

"Any minute!" Des Talcott warned.

But the chamber doors didn't burst inward. There wasn't a sound against their outer surfaces. Deming frowned. The silence was heavy.

"Damn them," he burst forth. "What are they planning. . . .?"

"Drop those guns, gentlemen. Drop 'em quick!"

Deming wheeled, and so did Des Talcott and the two others. Framed in the doorway leading to the pilot's compartment were three figures in black tunics. The raiders—they'd entered through Deming's compartment, through the nose of the ship!

Deming's lips twisted in a snarl. And the picture of the raiders, framed in the doorway, stamped itself instantly, panoramically, on his mind. One was short, fat. The one beside him was thin, and of medium height. And the third was big, and tall. All three had their faces masked in the same black that covered their bodies.

Then the guns of the raiders were squirting orange flame, and Deming heard Des Talcott cry out in terrible anguish as he

pitched to the floor, futilely trying to train his atomic pistol on the black figures in the doorway. The stench of burned flesh was horrible in the air. Deming had squeezed hard on his atomic pistol, but one of the two remaining Space Patrolmen pitched into him, breaking his aim. Deming fell sprawling to the floor, the fellow's dead body pinning him there. The third Space Patrolman didn't have a chance either. Deming saw him clutching terribly at his stomach, rising to his toes, then pitching forward on his face, his atomic pistol clattering uselessly to the floor planking.

Desperately, Deming was trying to roll free, trying to train his pistol again on the figures in the doorway. The stench of burning flesh was sickeningly stronger, and the tallest of the three black tuniced raiders was laughing harshly. Then Deming's brain was seared by a blinding explosion, and pin-points of light scattered wildly through the darkness that closed over his mind. . . .

THE excitement at the Earth landing base was great, as the pilotless little space ship drifted slowly down to mooring three hours later. When the chambers to the little ship were thrown open, and Captain Winters stepped into the rear compartment to find the bodies of four Space Patrolmen—three dead and one unconscious—the resultant horror and confusion was bedlam.

Space Patrolman Johnny Deming was the only man left alive. The small lump on the back of his head indicated instantly to Captain Winters that he had been knocked into unconsciousness. And when Deming had been carried from the ship, the gray-haired Captain Winters somberly faced his red-headed daughter.

"Dad," Kay Winters asked breathlessly, "is Johnny . . . is he . . . ?" Her lovely red lips trembled over the words, and there was anguish in her gray eyes.

"Johnny seems to be all right, Kay," Captain Winters said. "Out cold, but he'll come around. The others are dead. Burned to cinders. Ship is disabled. Been thoroughly rifled."

The tall, big-shouldered, dark-haired young man who stood beside Kay Winters squeezed the girl's arm reassuringly.

"Take it easy, Kay. Johnny'll come around. Don't worry." But there was something else, a hidden pain, in his blue eyes as he looked at Captain Winters. "The others are dead, Sir?"

Captain Winters nodded. Then, to his daughter:

"You'd better go now, Kay. We'll take you to Johnny shortly, after they bring him around."

When Kay had left, her father turned to the tall, big-shouldered young man.

"You're Johnny's best friend, Parke. I guess you know. If you don't, I'll tell you now. Johnny'll probably be held for court martial!"

Parke Markham's eyes went angry.

"But dammit, sir, it isn't fair. Johnny wouldn't funk out on—"

"You're a Space Patrolman, same as Johnny," Winters cut in. "You know what it means to be found beside three dead companions, fellow space officers, still alive, and hit on the *back* of the head. They died in the line of duty, Parke. Johnny came out of the mess with nothing worse than a knockout—and the raid was successful. What do you think the Trial Board will have to say about that?"

Parke Markham's jaw went grim.

"Johnny will be able to explain. I'm confident of that. There isn't a treacherous bone in that kid's frame. He's my—"

"He's your best friend, Parke," Winters cut in. "I know that. I have a strong attachment to Johnny myself, and I hope he'll have an explanation. But we'll have to wait until the Trial Board hearing. That should come tomorrow." Captain Winters turned, at that, and strode off.

Parke Markham stood there for a moment, fishing a cigarette out of the pocket of his crimson tunic. He started to light it. Then, in disgust, he hurled it away.

THE room was big and wide, and Johnny Deming blinked bewilderedly in the strong light that came from the ceiling. Before him, sitting at a simple army table were six men in crimson uniform tunics bearing the gold bars of Adjutant Trial Generals.

"I . . . I don't know. I swear I don't know!" Deming blurted again. The pain in the back of his head was worse now than it had been an hour before when they brought him in here. Deming didn't want to say anything about the pain. These men, whoever they were, wouldn't understand. They didn't understand that

he knew nothing. They didn't understand that he didn't know who they were, or why he was here. So how could they understand about the pain?

"Your lack of memory, Space Patrolman Deming, seems unusually convenient," one of the men at the table remarked.

Space Patrolman Deming. Space Patrolman Deming. He'd heard those words used in connection with him again and again. It must be his name. Deming. Deming. His name.

"Speak up, Johnny," the gray haired man beside him whispered fiercely. Johnny blinked at the gray haired man beside him. The gray haired man wore a crimson tunic, and people called him Captain Winters.

"I don't know," Johnny repeated, clenching his fists into tight balls so that they wouldn't see the pain was tearing the back of his head apart. "I don't know. I don't know!"

"This man's memory is gone!" Captain Winters burst forth. "Can't you see? His memory is gone!"

Johnny blinked again, fighting back the pain as one of the men at the table answered impatiently.

"The man on trial has been examined thoroughly. The report states that the blow on the back of his head couldn't possibly have caused a loss of memory. We've stated that before." The examiner was growing angry. "If Space Patrolman Deming sees fit to carry on this hoax, we will be forced to conclude this trial here and now—handing in the obvious verdict!"

In order to fight off the pain, Deming blurted:

"I don't know!"

"Johnny!" Captain Winters' voice was despairing.

The heads of the uniformed men bent together. Then one of them spoke.

"We have our verdict. Space Patrolman Deming is hereby found guilty of wilful neglect of duty, cowardice in the face of fire, and is dismissed from the Space Patrol Forces!"

Above the clamor that rose suddenly in the room, Johnny Deming said again, desperately:

"I don't know, I tell you. I don't know!" But his voice was unheard as, slowly, he was led out of the humming, excited turmoil in that big room . . .

THEY had taken his crimson tunic from him, and now he was dressed in drab brown, and he moved wearily out of the big building, the pain still throbbing heavily in the back of his skull. Deming wished that somehow they would have understood him, those men in crimson. He didn't know why. He didn't know anything, except that the gray haired man they called Winters had left him, and that now he was alone, and that people in the building he was leaving stared strangely at him.

On the steps of the building, Deming saw the girl.

He had seen her before, as he was being questioned in the quarters they called the Medical Room; and he had seen her again as he entered the big room where the men at the table hurled questions at him, and then let him go. Her hair was red, and he could see that she was very lovely. He had heard her called Kay by the gray haired man.

"Johnny," said Kay Winters, rushing toward him. "Oh, Johnny, what did they do to you? Johnny, Johnny!"

And then her arms were around him, and he caught the sweet scent of her perfume in his nostrils. He blinked, and moved her arms away.

"I don't care, Johnny," she was saying. "I don't care if you are pretending. I don't care if they have broken you from the service. I'll go with you, Johnny, wherever you plan on going!"

The pain suddenly grew greater, almost impossible, and to keep her from seeing it, Deming cried out.

"I don't know. Go away. Let me alone. I don't know. Let me alone, I tell you!"

Kay Winters' face went ashen, and she looked as though she had been struck.

"Johnny!" she gasped, backing slightly. "Johnny, I told you I don't care. You don't have to pretend in front of me, Johnny. You'll always be the same to me, no matter what you've done!"

"Go away," he repeated despairingly. "Go away." The pain was terrible, now. "Let me alone, do you hear? Let me alone!"

And suddenly the redheaded girl was sobbing. Sobbing and tearing a ring from her finger. She threw the ring into his startled face, and her breath came chokingly as she said:

"John Deming, I despise you, do you

understand? I despise you!"

The ring had cut Johnny Deming's face, and as the girl rushed away, he bent over, picking it up. For a minute he stared at it bewilderedly, then at the retreating figure of the girl. Shrugging in perplexity, he put the ring in his tunic pocket. The pain in his head was worse as he moved stumblingly down the steps . . .

PARKE MARKHAM sat dejectedly on the edge of Captain Winters' desk. His big shoulders were slumped unhappily, and his lank frame was the picture of despondency. He buried his face in his big hands.

"Damn," he muttered miserably. "I *had* to make that report, Captain. Don't you understand, Captain Winters? I *had* to!"

Captain Winters reached forward and put a hand reassuringly on Parke Markham's shoulder.

"I know, boy. I wish to God that they'd have assigned another medical Space Patrol officer to give Johnny his exam. You'd think they'd have brains enough to realize he was your best friend. But you had to give your report straight, boy. You couldn't have done otherwise. Johnny wouldn't have wanted you to do otherwise. If your medical findings were positive that Johnny wasn't suffering from amnesia, you had to hand them in as such. Don't take it so hard!"

"But I've been the cause of his getting tossed out of the service. I'll never forget that. Oh damn, why didn't Johnny play it straight, and not try to fake that amnesia!" Parke Markham's words were despairing.

"Someday, perhaps, we'll find out," Captain Winters said. "I hope so, Parke, for your sake as well as Johnny's and Kay's."

"She's taken it hard, hasn't she?"

Captain Winters nodded.

"She was willing to stick with him through hell and space storms, Parke. Even if he'd been the lowest blot in space. But he drove her from him. Poor kid, she'll be a long time getting over it."

"Damn," Parke Markham exploded. "I wish he'd never been assigned to that job. This never would have happened. Those papers he was supposed to bring secretly to you are gone, and the whole thing has been useless."

Captain Winters paused thoughtfully in paging through the papers on his desk. He looked up at Markham, clearing his throat.

"It's more ironic than that, Parke. Those papers I gave Johnny to carry were phonies. They were a lure, a decoy, necessary in getting the real papers through to us. The real papers will go through within the next two days, and you're going to be assigned to carry them."

Parke Markham's face was astonished.

"Phonies? Why, wha—"

Winters broke in.

"The Martian powers, as we all know, are anxious to get hold of those papers. Well they got Johnny's decoy ship, and a phony set of papers. Now the way is clear to bring the real ones through. I was hoping Johnny could make the run unmolested. He had a better than even chance of getting through. I didn't want to assign the task to him, but he insisted. Now you can carry on, Parke, and get through with the real papers."

Parke Markham whistled softly.

"My God," he broke out. "Poor Johnny got broken for all that. The poor kid, the poor damned kid!" He buried his head in his hands once more, shuddering.

"You'll leave for Planet Seven tonight, Parke. You'll pick up the real papers from our agent in the Consular office there. You'll bring them away casually, inconspicuously, as a passenger on the Space Liner *Majestic*. To further avert suspicion, Kay and I will also be aboard the liner."

"Poor Johnny," Parke Markham said softly, bitterly. And once more Winters' strong old hand found Markham's shoulder. "It's all part of this dizzy game of interplanetary intrigue, Parke. Remember that. We can't do much about it. We do as we're told," the old man said. Parke Markham nodded wearily . . .

JOHNNY DEMING had been sitting over an untasted glass of Venusian wine for better than an hour. The noise in the spacefront dive seemed somehow to deaden the pain in the back of his head. Everything was still quite confused, vague. He had given up straining to bring the things around him into focus. It just made the pain worse. There didn't seem to be any use to it.

He was a bit surprised when the two men drew chairs up to his table; and slightly bewildered when they spoke to him.

"You're Deming, Johnny Deming, aren't you?" one of the men asked. He was thin, with a ratish face, and of medium stature.

His features indicated there might be a strain of Martian blood in him somewhere.

Deming nodded, dully. He knew that much.

"Got a raw deal from the Trial Board today, I understand," the second fellow said. There was a guttural accentation to his words, and he was short and fat, with a blue stubble of beard covering his jowls.

Deming stared wordlessly at them. He couldn't think of anything to say.

"We'd like you to throw in with us, Deming. We could use an experienced space pilot," the thin man said abruptly. "There'll be money in it for you, until you can find something else."

Space pilot. Space pilot. Deming realized dully that he was a space pilot. Dully, too, he realized that he'd need money. People needed money. He nodded.

"All right. All right. Who are you? I don't know you."

The two men looked at one another, exchanging winks.

"My name is Barnes," the short, fat fellow said. "My friend, here, is Terell." The thin chap nodded acknowledgment.

"I'll need money," Deming said half to himself. And the two men laughed as though at something very funny.

"We start tonight. Got a job right off the start, Deming. Let's get out of here," Barnes, the short fat one said rising. Terell had risen, too, and Deming found himself on his feet, moving to the door with these men . . .

TWO black tuniced men sat in the tiny observation shack which was the only building on the uncharted little asteroid lying somewhere in space between Planet Seven and Earth. Outside could be heard the muffled roar of rockets cutting down to landing speed.

"They're here on time," said the first fellow.

"With Deming," the second nodded. "I still can't see why in the hell they want that guy around for the job."

It's orders from the Chief," the first replied. "That Deming is gonna be the goat on this job. A perfect frame-up." He laughed unpleasantly. "When we stop the *Majestic* and board 'er, this guy Deming will be with us. He'll be left there when we leave. We'll have the papers and Deming will take the rap. He won't know what in the hell it's all about."

"Can't remember a thing, eh?" the second said wonderingly.

"Not a thing, memory shot to hell. Doesn't even know the time of day. A perfect frame."

The door of the little shack burst inward, and Johnny Deming, framed on either side by Barnes and Terell, entered. His eyes were puzzled, and he looked bewilderedly around, finally noticing the two men in black tunics.

"Two more of the boys, Johnny," said Barnes, his fat face creasing in a mocking smirk. "They're part of our outfit."

The two black tuniced chaps stood up.

"We'll go out and get the ship ready, Barnes," the first one said. "It won't be long before the *Majestic* will be due by."

The men in the black tunics stepped out, and Terell turned to Deming.

"We're going out to meet a space liner tonight, Deming. You'll come along with us. We'd better get your gear ready, for you're gonna have to dress the part."

Deming nodded, and the action made his head ache terribly for an instant.

"I'll need money," he said parrot-like. Barnes and Terell laughed again. Terell stepped over to a chest, opened the lid, and began to dig around inside it. He brought forth a black metallic tunic, and a silver chromealloy holster, to which two atomic pistols were strapped.

"Some supplies," he remarked tersely. "Here!" He tossed the tunic and guns in Deming's direction. They fell at his feet, and he stared at them, face going pale.

"What the hell's wrong?" Barnes barked.

Deming's eyes widened, and sweat stood out on his brow. He was trembling now, shaking like a man with ague. With a horrible nostalgia, the smell of burning flesh came sweeping to his senses. The atomic pistols, shining in the light, seemed blazing into his brain. And Johnny Deming broke completely.

"No! No!" His voice was a maddened, terrified shriek. "Take them away! Take them away! Those guns, those damned guns!" He threw his hands wildly in front of his face, backing desperately away.

Barnes bent and picked up the tunic and the weapons. His face was agape with surprise. He threw the guns to Terell.

"Put 'em in the chest," he ordered. And as Terell did so, Deming's terror subsided, though he still trembled fearfully.

"Gun crazy," Barnes breathed in wonder.

"This guy goes goofy at the sight of them guns!"

"Maybe it makes him kinda remember things," Terell said. "In a fuzzy way."

"I don't know," Deming was repeating brokenly again and again. "I don't know. For God's sake keep those guns away. Keep them away!"

The mocking laughter of Barnes and Terell was suddenly loud in the little room, but Deming's eyes were still riveted fearfully on the chest where the guns had been thrown. . . .

TWO hours later, Terell came back into the little observation shack where Deming and Barnes were waiting. His face was puzzled, and he spoke to Barnes.

"Plans have been changed," he announced.

"Changed?" Barnes was equally surprised.

"Yeah, I got the Chief on the voidaphone in our space ship. There are three sets of papers aboard the *Majestic*. Not only does Markham have a set, but Captain Winters and his daughter are both carrying sets. We can't tell which are the real articles. We'll have to heist them all."

Deming looked up at the mention of "papers." He tried to pierce the fog of pain, but unsuccessfully. Then he shrugged, looking down at the floor once more.

"We won't be able to take goofy along either, under this setup," Terell went on, pointing to Johnny. "I explained his quirk to the Chief. There'll be some gun play when we stop the *Majestic*, and we can't afford to run the risk of Deming going hog wild and botching the job. The Chief says to leave him here. We'll board the ship and take off the people carrying the papers. That'll leave Deming here to meet 'em when we bring them here. We can work the same tie-up we planned for him, then."

Barnes nodded.

"That ought to take care of it. When we set to go?"

"Pronto," Terell replied. "Sykes and Grant are outside warming up both ships."

Deming realized vaguely that Sykes and Grant were the two black tuniced fellows he had first seen in the shack.

"Sykes and Grant will get out of the picture, once we stop the *Majestic* and bring the people with the papers here," Terell went on. "You and me and the Chief will take over after that. When we get what we want we'll see that the job is pinned on—" he broke off, pointing to Deming.

"So we leave Deming here until we come back, eh?" Barnes asked.

Johnny had been trying to follow their words. But none of it made sense, so he sat there motionless, head in his hands.

"Yeah," said Terell, grinning maliciously. "We leave Deming here." He walked over to the chest, rummaging deep in it, and again brought out a black tunic.

"Put this on," he ordered. Obediently Deming donned the tunic.

Then Terell pulled forth two atomic pistols. While Deming's face suddenly went ashen in fear, Terell threw the guns on the floor, in front of Deming.

"Watch those for us, Deming," Terell said mockingly.

Barnes laughed, then, and the two of them moved out of the shack, leaving Deming staring horrified at the guns on the floor before him. His face twitched spasmodically, and his hands worked jerkily, tensely, as he fought back the stark, raving fear that was closing in on him. Again the odor of seared flesh was strong in his nostrils. And in the back of his brain he could hear over and over again the muffled scream of a falling comrade.

JOHNNY DEMING had no idea of the length of time he had been standing there in the shack, back pressed against the wall. His eyes were dull, lifeless, and held in horrible fascination on the two gleaming guns that lay at his feet. The frenzy in his mind at the first sight of the guns, when Terell had thrown them at his feet and left, had long since passed into a gray, ghastly blanket of utter terror. He stood there frozen, hypnotized, by fear.

He didn't hear the roar of rocket motors outside the shack. He didn't even look up when, minutes later, the door to the shack was kicked open.

Captain Winters and his daughter Kay, were shoved into the room. Both the Captain and Kay were securely bound.

Still Johnny Deming didn't look up. It was as though there had been no impression, no interruption, made on the pattern of hypnosis that held him helpless. He didn't hear the roar of one rocket ship departing, seconds after that.

Kay Winters was the first to speak, her

voice incredulous, agonized. She said one word.

"Johnny!"

"My God!" The words tumbled from Captain Winters' lips. There was a disbelief, then a swift loathing, in his eyes. "You're at the bottom of this, Deming!"

Red-headed Kay Winters, too, was staring at him with shocked, unbelieving agony.

"Johnny!" she said again. Her voice was a shrill sob.

Something in the tone of Kay Winters' voice caused Johnny Deming to raise his head slowly, dazedly, like a sleepwalker. His eyes, as they looked bewilderedly at the girl and her father, had the same flat dullness to them.

"Damn you, Deming!" Captain Winters exploded. "I can see it now. You were in on this from the very begining. You engineered the hijacking of your own ship, faked your amnesia. Then when you found the papers weren't what the Martian government had paid you to get, you arranged for the second crack at stealing them!" His words were tumbling hotly, one over the other.

"Obviously, you found out about the second plan to bring the papers through, and found out, too, that three sets were being carried. You didn't stop at anything in planning to halt the *Majestic,* and shanghaing the girl you were to marry, your former Captain, and your best friend, in order to insure getting all three sets of those plans!"

But Johnny Deming's expression hadn't changed during this outburst. His face, ghastly, white, strained, seemed drained of all emotion save the strange hypnosis he was under.

"Damn you, Deming!" Winters' voice rose. "What are you going to do with us, now that your thugs have us here? And what have you done with Parke Markham?"

The door was opened again, and Deming's expressionless eyes flicked dully to it.

Three men in black tunics, faces masked completely, stood framed in the archway. One was short, fat. The second was of medium stature, and thin. The third was big, and tall. All three carried atomic pistols in their hands.

THERE was a strange tingling at the nape of Deming's neck, and for an instant the pain in his head was almost unbearable. Then something snapped, and in a blazing, surging instant, *Deming knew, Deming remembered!*

The scene was exactly the same as it had been when the raiders had entered his ship!

Johnny Deming knew only one thing now. These were the men who had killed Des Talcott and brutally slain his other two comrades. These men in the door. Johnny didn't know how he had gotten here, or what Kay Winters and Captain Winters were doing in this strange shack. He only knew that it seemed like but a second since he had last seen the black tuniced raiders as their pistols spit death around him.

Deming's eyes had caught the gleaming atomic pistols at his feet. Now he dove for them, came up on his knees, a gun in each hand blazing hell and death at the figures in the doorway!

The men in the black tunics had been taken by surprise. Too late the black figures squeezed the triggers of their atomic pistols. For Deming's shots were deadly, final. And the orange bursts of flame from his guns sent all three pitching to the floor, clawing at the awful pain of their burning bodies.

Deming stood there, swaying slightly, the guns hanging limply from his hands. His eyes were bewildered, but there was life in them now. Life and intelligence.

"They were the ones, in the black cruiser. They killed Des, a little while ago. They killed the others, too. They . . ." his words faltered, and he moved over to the bodies, bending over the tallest of the three. He jerked the mask from the rigid features.

"Parke Markham!" came in astonishment from Captain Winters.

But Deming was already tearing the masks from the other two. He looked at the faces of Barnes and Terell frozen in death. He frowned, for he couldn't recall ever having seen them before.

"I killed Parke. Parke . . . my best friend. Why did he try to stop my ship . . . black cruiser was his . . . I had the cannons trained, I—" and he fell face forward in exhaustion, consciousness mercifully leaving him . . .

CAPTAIN WINTERS was beside Johnny's bed in the Earth Hospital Base. His gray head was bent slightly, and his voice was lowered as he spoke.

"That's what happened, Johnny. Parke was in the pay of the Martian government.

He tried to get the papers from you the first time, and thought he'd succeeded. But then I unwittingly tipped him off that those were the wrong papers. When we were aboard the *Majestic*, leaving Planet Seven for Earth, I made the additional mistake of telling him that Kay and I were also carrying papers, and that only one of the three sets was the right one. He must have gotten in touch with his henchmen on the asteroid they brought us to."

"But," Deming's voice was perplexed as he broke in, "you say that no one believed I had amnesia?"

"No," Winters answered. "Parke was your medical examiner. He knew you had amnesia, and turned in a false report saying you didn't have. Then, knowing you were in that condition, he hit on the additional scheme to frame you to take the rap for his crime."

"Why?" Deming's voice was low.

"He could shift any possible suspicion from himself, that way. And, too," Winters voice was soft, "Parke loved Kay, Johnny. He knew that Kay would always stick by you, unless you were permanently eliminated."

The two were silent for a moment. Then Winters said:

"Parke figured that he could always say he was held a separate captive from us, when all three of us were taken forcibly from the liner *Majestic*. We never would have doubted him, had things worked out as planned."

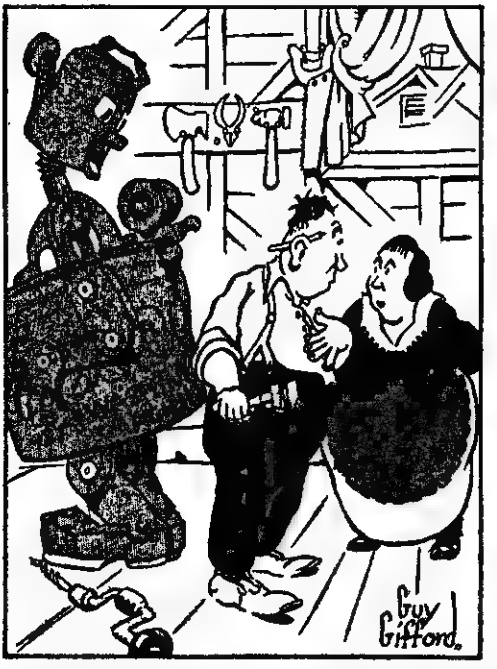
"The doctors tell me that I might never have regained my memory, if the sight of the three black figures in the doorway hadn't hit me in precisely the same manner that I saw them before," Deming said slowly. "That was the last thing I remembered when I lost my memory at the start—those figures. I never thought that one of them was Parke!"

A nurse put her head into the room. "Another visitor to see you, Space Patrol Lieutenant Deming!" And Deming turned his blond head on the pillow to see Kay Winters entering the room.

Captain Winters rose hurriedly. "I'll be back again, Johnny. I've some things to attend to." He hurried out.

Deming watched Captain Winters leave. Then he grinned, holding out his arms to Kay. Her red head was on his shoulder, and the scent of her perfume was something concocted by the gods.

"Your father," Deming told Kay, "is a smart man. And very discreet. Very discreet." Then he bent his head and stopped her answer to that remark. . . .



"The man from the finance company is here. I think he's come for the washing machine."

"It's the efficiency expert's idea. He says a second saved is a second earned—robot scale."

Number Six had a green-clad figure in its clutches!

# of SUPER CITY

BY DON WILCOX

Ben Gleed was proud of the B-Hive—until the Iron Men ran amok and spread death in the great freight depot.

THEIR only moon was the illumined clock which hung over the street intersection. It shone starkly into the open front porch where they were sitting.

"It's midnight," the girl in Daniel Holland's arms whispered. "You'd better go."

Daniel Holland gave a muffled laugh. "Don't say it in such a weird tone. It sounds like, 'Run! The cops are coming!'"

"But you've got to be at work in an hour, Dan. You don't dare be late again—"

"I know—"

"I dreamed last night that you were *fired*, Dan. I dreamed—"

For a long moment Doris White's words were lost. Kisses always took precedence over conversation when she and Daniel Holland were alone. The purplish-white lights from the Super City skyscrapers touched the girl's yellow hair with a platinum gleam, made her upturned eyes shine like blue starlight.

"I dreamed that they fired you and deported you from Super City."

Dan Holland chuckled lightly. "Don't worry. I'm not *that* negligent."

"Do you believe in dreams, Dan?"

"Just in *our* dream." There was another good-night kiss before Dan picked up his cap.

"Wait!" Doris protested. "Your hair. It's a sight."

She reached into his shirt pocket for his pocket comb, gave his scalp a playful drubbing. Before returning the comb to his uniform pocket she stopped to scold.

"You've broken three or four teeth out of this new comb."

Dan Holland grinned.

"On purpose. That's my way of cutting notches in my gun."

"Everytime you kill off an Indian, I suppose."

"Everytime I *tell off* a white man."

"You'd better be careful, Dan. Your job—"

Dan interrupted her by catching her wrist and calmly removing the comb from her hand.

"While we're on the subject I may as

well tell *you* off. You think I was responsible for that accident at the Freight B-Hive. I *wasn't*. Just because I happened to be a few minutes late for work—"

"Dan, I never said you were to blame."

"No one has *said* so. Not to me. But the Iron Man that went haywire and threw Kerstubber into the freight capsule and shot him into the tube and broke both his legs *happened* to go haywire on my time. And I didn't *happen* to be there. If I had been, the accident would have happened to me instead of Kerstubber. It was in the cards to happen *when* it did."

"But *I* heard—" Doris hesitated, noting the dangerous light in her boy friend's eyes. "*What* did you hear?"

"Some of the men in our restaurant were saying that it was a case of fatigue, and if Kerstubber had been relieved *on time*—"

"Nuts! I wasn't but twenty minutes late. You know that. That was the night we danced at the Frolic and it rained and we had to wait for a taxi. I was supposed to take over Iron Man number eleven at one a. am. I got there at one-twenty and found the whole B-Hive in a jam and Kerstubber in an ambulance. *Nobody's* going to tell me that those extra few minutes on top of six hours did it; and that goes for you, Doris!"

Doris White's lips parted in mute appreciation of the fact that she had been "told off." Dan snapped off another tooth of his comb, slipped the comb in his pocket, put his cap on.

Mrs. White appeared at the door. "Telephone for you, Dan."

INSIDE the living room Dan faced one of his companions in the telescreen. It was Pudgy, the operator of Iron Man number ten, a close friend of Dan's. He was calling from the B-Hive.

"Lissen, fella," said Pudgy in a low voice, "the boss has been tryin' to reach you. Wants you here in a hurry. Your Iron Man—"

"I'm not due till one."

"He wants you early. He's been tryin' since before midnight. I told him I thought I could locate you. So make it snappy, fella—"

"Wait a minute! What's the rip?"

"Your Iron Man's actin' up. This new guy that followed Kerstubber is nervous. Damn thing's taken a couple swipes at him, and he's so jittery with his blue flashlight that he'll probably queer the works. The boss figures it's just the dish for *you*—"

"Yeah?" Dan Holland was slowly gathering rage.

"Owin' to the fact that you let Iron Man number eleven go blim-blam in the first place—"

. . "*I* did!" Dan Holland roared into the television transmitter. "What do you mean, *I* did? Listen, Pudgy—" And with a challenging snarl he reached for his pocket comb. But before he could flip a tooth out of it, another voice cut into the speaker and another face into the screen. It was Jacobs, the night boss.

"You got Dan Hollands? Lemme have him." This to Pudgy. Then, "*Hollands!* Git the hell over here. Grab a taxi! Hurry! We're about to jam up!"

Even as the boss shouted his orders, Dan heard the shrill echo of the B-Hive alarm from the background. Ramming his comb in his pocket, he dashed for the door.

"See you later!"

Slam!

What it was all about Doris was left to puzzle out for herself.

CHAPTER II

The Swarming B-Hive

THE sights and sounds that Dan passed through on his swift taxi ride to the center of the city were so much water off a duck's back. He was lost in his own hard-boiled thoughts. Streamlined skyscrapers, swift-moving electric signs, lines of people slipping along on power-driven roller skates—all were familiar scenery to Dan.

Even the televised news, which he snapped on absently the instant he stepped into the taxi, made no impression on him.

Any stranger undergoing these numerous stimulations for the first time would have been amazed. Here it was, a half an hour past midnight, and many of the streets were lighted like day. Crowds were thronging into factories and office buildings as well as theaters and taverns. Obviously day and night had lost their original meanings in this high-speed city.

Half the population might be snoring peacefully. The other half would keep the wheels of production whirling—silently! The noise and bustle of the old- pre-power-age metropolis was gone. Super City had set

a new pace for the world.

As the flashing signs indicated, production of goods was on the up-and-up. So were profits and wages and working conditions. Emblazoned spot-maps on the sides of buildings showed that the products of Efficio, Inc., reached around the world.

Efficio! The word had become magic. The trade mark, a design of the famous Super City skyline, was a guarantee of high quality goods produced by the most efficient methods that modern science could devise.

That was why Dan Holland and every other citizen of Super City were proud of their jobs. That was why any of them would have given five years of their life rather than fail. Every man and woman in the city knew that the working pace was as swift as belt lines and as relentless as electric generators. The price of failure was a cruel disgrace—deportation. Every month a few employees were deported. But for those who could measure up to the requirements, Super City offered the ideal life—work to their liking six hours a day, sandwiched into a flexible year's schedule of vacations and celebrations and all manner of recreational activities.

Life as you would choose it, in short; and under the finest of living conditions! That was what six hours of *efficient* work per day made possible.

THE newscaster facing Dan Holland from the television screen in the rear seat of the taxi made little impression upon the troubled young freight worker. Still, the mention of Ben Gleed, Super City's renowned city manager, brought Dan to attention. Ben Gleed was always news with a capital N. Gleed was every worker's friend.

"Ben Gleed will be host to a group of official visitors from the metropolis of Oil Center this afternoon, according to a midnight bulletin just received. Evidently Oil Center has consented to bury the hatchet. Mr. Gleed's comment upon the visit reads as follows. We quote:

" 'I take pleasure in announcing that technicians and city officials from Oil Center, our nearest neighbor among the large cities of America, have at last accepted my personal invitation to come and look us over. This visit signalizes the completion of the first milestone in Super City's good will program. New York, Chicago, Detroit, San Francsco. . . all have sent their official representatives; not to mention several important foreign cities. But until now, Oil Center has held back.

" 'Again let us emphasize that it is not the aim of Super City to reach out for more than her share of the world's business. It is rather our purpose to demonstrate that a city *planned for efficiency* is a paying proposition. We do not withhold our secrets of efficiency. We offer them to our neighbors. We urge that every city follow our lead.

" 'Unfortunately there has been a widespread rumor to the effect that Oil Center and Super City have been glaring at each other enviously. Stories have gone so far as to hint that Oil Center would like to throw monkey wrenches into Super City's smoothly humming machinery.

" 'Let us put an end to this idle talk at once and for all. Oil Center is our neighbor and friend. We appreciate this visit as a symbol of that friendship.' End of quotation.

"It is believed," the announcer continued, "that Ben Gleed will personally conduct the Oil Center delegation on a sight-seeing tour to points of interest. . ."

The newscast hopped hither and thither over the globe: estimates of crops from China; new transportation lines in South America; the ever-present troubles from European capitals. Suddenly it leaped back to Super City with a vengeance.

"Flash! Super City: An unconfirmed report from the Super City Clearing House for Class B Freight, popularly known as the B-Hive, indicates that trouble is brewing again. Ten minutes ago one of the machines got out of control. An alarm was sounded, and for three minutes the freight capsules gathered up, forming a dangerous log-jam.

"Flash! The Super City B-Hive. An official telephone confirmation of the freight capsule log-jam has just been received. However, the jam is rapidly being cleared. A swift examination of one of the sorting machines, Iron Man number eleven, failed to reveal any mechanical flaws. Whether faulty operation will be declared responsible is not known at present. At least the Iron Men have gone back into action and the flow of freight capsules continues. The interruption lasted only three minutes. All of which recalls a similar instance of last week, when a workman was badly injured.

"Our next bulletin comes from Oil Center. A delegation of ten men will leave for Super City at six o'clock this morning. . . ."

Dan Holland's taxi stopped. Dan leaped out, boarded the moving sidewalk, ran. He dodged the scattered lines of persons moving with him, bounded through the open door to the visitor's balcony. The guard tried to stop him.

"Let me through!" Holland snarled. "I'm Holland. Night shift. Number eleven—"

THE guard glanced at the numerals on Dan's green work uniform, stepped aside. From the turmoil that buzzed within the vast room, together with the recent jangle of alarms, the guard could understand a worker's wanting to take a short cut to his station. Particularly when that station was the trouble-making Iron Man number eleven.

Dan ploughed through the throngs of visitors swarming on the vast circular balcony. Two more guards tried to stop him when he started to climb over the rail. In his flurry he lost his cap, he ripped his shirt; and as if ignoring the guards and slipping down over the rail weren't trouble enough, he picked up a wad of chewing gum on his shoe on the next lower balcony.

With a couple of kicks and a muttered "Damn!" he raced around the narrow rail-enclosed walk. This was the engineer's domain. No one but the engineers and that fussy old clean-up man were ever seen on this narrow second balcony. This was the walk from which the engineers serviced the bright steel cogs and the sensitive electric eyes of the Iron Men.

But Dan Holland was in demand at his station. Under the conditions he couldn't get there too soon. So he didn't mind taking a chance with regulations. By dropping down over two balconies he would save all the valuable seconds of checking in, punching the time clock, and center-rushing through a crowded dressing room; not to mention negotiating two flights of stairs.

Thud! Thud! Dan Holland crashed squarely into Snickson, the fussy, bushy-browed clean-up man, who suddenly emerged from a balcony door. There was a spill. Both men spilled. So did half of their pocket things, including Dan's pocket comb and Snickson's cigarets and coins and a package of little transparent sheets that might have been bits of cellophane or candy wrappers.

"Git off this balcony, you damned—"

"Get out of my way!" Holland retorted, grabbing his comb.

"Nobody trespasses on *this* walk. I'll report you!"

"Go to hell!" Holland blasted, flipping a tooth out of the comb. "This is an emergency!"

While Snickson grumbled and picked himself up, Holland climbed down over the railing, dropped nimbly to his work platform beside Iron Man number eleven.

"Well, thank the Lord you've got here at last!" barked a voice at Holland's side. It was Jacobs, the night boss, his red face streaming with perspiration. "Take over for that guy. He's so jittery he forgets to turn off his flashlight. I was just coming to take over myself. What the—"

"Where is he?" Dan shouted.

A shriek from overhead answered the question. And instantly the screams of a score of visitors on the upper balcony foretold the calamitous event that hung in mid-air.

The huge metallic claw of Iron Man number eleven swung the green-uniformed worker through space, deposited him in the tank-like freight capsule. An automatic *clink!* and the capsule went shut.

Dan Holland sprang for the check lever. He was too late. The Iron Man's shoe pushed the tank-like capsule into the aperture. *Swooosh!* The capsule was gone—gone at lightning speed on a Super City pneumatic tube route!

"Take over, Holland!"

Dan Holland obeyed. This was no time for questioning what had happened to the other workman. Freight was rolling in, thick and fast. It had to be handled—*now!*

Jacobs dashed away. He made for the first telephone booth. A guard swung the door open for him. In a moment he was connected with one of Super City's railway freight terminals.

"This is Jacobs at the B-Hive. We've made a blunder on Iron Men number eleven. A workman—what's that? . . . He's come through already? The capsule dumped him in the freight car? . . . Under a ton of porcelain—yes . . . Killed instantly, you think? . . . Certainly, give the facts to the reporters."

Jacobs hung up. As he stepped out of

the booth he turned to the guard who had stood nearby, all ears.

"If you heard," said Jacobs, "don't be spilling it around where it'll get back to Dan Holland. Lord knows we've got to keep *somebody* on Iron Man number eleven."

CHAPTER III

Iron Men at Work

DORIS WHITE couldn't sleep. She snapped on the radio beside her bed, tuned in an orchestra, switched off the television light. The darkness together with soft music should have lulled her to sleep. But it didn't. Her uneasiness for Dan's job kept haunting her. She turned on the television light, idly pressed the tuning keys.

"More news from the Super B-Hive," came the voice of the newscaster. Doris sat bolt upright, thoroughly awake. "A workman had met with a fatal accident. One of the freight sorting machines, Iron Man number eleven, reported to be giving trouble a few minutes ago, has just now dealt death to Emil Hayden, substitute operator on the last shift of the day."

"Hayden!" Doris gasped. She did not know who Hayden was, but the sudden tragic announcement shot her through with a paralyzing fear. She fell back on the bed, limp, weak from fright. Hayden! And to think—it might have been *Holland!*

The newscaster rambled on. "Witnesses to the accident insist that carelessness on the part of the worker himself was to blame. However, no official statement of responsibility has been made. Iron Man number eleven, let us note, has performed somewhat erratically since an earlier accident last week, at which time unofficial observers declared that neglect of duty on the part of a workman was probably to blame."

"Neglect of duty!" Doris echoed in trembling voice. So that was what they were saying about Dan. A terrifying picture was suddenly before Doris' eyes. The picture from her dream—Dan being fired—Dan being deported.

Hastily she got into her clothes. She called a taxi. She left a note for her mother and departed.

All the way to the B-Hive that terrifying picture in her mind tortured her. Only it was a series of pictures by now. The toppling of an air castle. The crashing of the happiness they had planned for the future. Dan searching for a job in other cities. Employers shaking their heads, recalling Dan's picture in the papers. We know about you, Holland. You're the man who neglected your machine. You were responsible for some injuries—and deaths. No, Holland, we can't use you. . . .

Doris gave a little choked cry. The taxi driver turned around and glared at her and said, "Whatsamatter, kid?" But she didn't hear. The blackest picture of all suddenly came back to her. Dan Holland might be killed—the same as Hayden was killed!

The newscaster had described it in detail. Dazedly Doris had caught those details—the metal claw that had picked the workman up and dropped him into a freight capsule—the shoe that had kicked that capsule into the suction tunnel—the lightning ride through miles of space to the freight terminal—the sudden stop that doubtless crushed the skull—the fall into the freight car amid tons of heavy crates. . . .

"Kin ya make it in by yerself?" the taxi driver asked, helping her out. She acted as if she might fall down on the way up steps, he thought. He looked after her until she disappeared in the throngs that flowed into the visitor's entrance of the B-Hive.

"She ain't drunk," he muttered as he got back in his seat, "an' she looks like she's got good sense. *Extra* good sense—an' extra good looks. But she's sure-as-hell dizzy about somethin'."

DORIS WHITE was carried along with the crowd into the upper level of the vast industrial amphitheatre know as the B-Hive. Her heart was fluttering more than ever. Now that she was here she hadn't the slightest idea what she was going to do.

In a vague sense she had set forth from home with a plan. She would come and find Dan. She would demand to know whether there was something wrong with the machine he operated. If there was, she would insist that the thing be stopped. She would even call Ben Gleed himself, if the boss wouldn't listen to her.

But if the machine itself was all right, and all these troubles could be chalked up to bad operation, then she was going to

stand over Dan Holland with a club, if necessary, and see that he didn't take his mind off his work for one second. The instant he looked as if he was going dreamy, thinking about his date with her, she would make him get back to business—

However, that was the point at which her plan of action became the most vague. After all, it might be thoughts of her that caused him to be negligent—

At once all these mental revolvings swept themselves away. Doris gazing across the busy, turbulent B-Hive for the first time in her life found it all so much vaster than she had imagined it that she felt helpless. No wonder Dan had always dissuaded her from coming here to find him. The big circular freight arena that she looked down upon was like a colossal ant hill swarming with green ants.

Doris gazed for several minutes before she figured out just what was taking place.

The shiny metallic capsules, nearly as large as locomotive boilers, made their first appearance at the very center of the arena. They boiled up like a fountain of mammoth molecules. Automatically they opened, depositing their contents on the polished sides of the great revolving cone. It was this cone, forming the central area of the arena, which had given Doris the momentary impression of a giant ant hill.

She watched the capsules open, deposit their contents, and roll away empty. So this was the revolving deck to which all outbound Class B freight—freight items small enough to be handled in these huge pneumatic-tube capsules—was sent. This was the world's fastest freight clearing house. And the world's busiest.

Now her eye caught a pile of red and white shipping boxes. Those were Efficio television sets, she knew. She had once visited the factory and remembered that all outbound goods were simply placed on a conveyor belt which carried them into a freight capsule. Then the capsule had sped away through the suction tunnel.

So this was where they came. As Doris watched, she saw the boxes slide gently to the outer edges of the gigantic cone.

"EVERY box is numbered," she heard someone explaining to a group of visitors who crowded at the railing near her. "They're numbered according to which of the fifty odd transportation lines they're going out over—rail, truck, water and air. When an operator sees a box coming around with his number on it—say he's operating Iron Man number five, for example—he sees a box or maybe a bunch of boxes with fives scribbled on them—they're his to handle."

"You mean his *Iron Man* handles them?" a listener asked.

"Right. All the operator has to do is turn his flashlight on the boxes he wants. The electric eyes on his Iron Man catch the signal and the big steel arm reaches out and picks up the boxes in its metal fingers, and loads the stuff into its outbound capsule. Number five, for example, shoots its stuff out north five miles to the Great Circle Air Freighters."

Doris, looking down on the heaps of freight that slid outward to the circumference of the broad revolving cone, was able to follow this explanation perfectly. She saw the operators spaced at regular intervals around the vast circle. She saw the huge steel arms, the "Iron Men"—one to each operator, mutely obeying the commands of colored flashlight beams against the sides of boxes.

How innocently those great metallic fingers worked. And yet how deadly their terrific power!

"Why so many colors of flashlight beams?" someone asked.

"You'll notice," the explainer replied, "that there are no two blues, for example, or no two reds, side by side. Each Iron Man's electirc eyes are filtered for a certain color. If there were two reds side by side, the arms would reach over and take each other's goods."

Doris started to move on around the circular balcony. From the run of the Iron Men's numbers directly below her she knew that Dan and his number eleven must be at the other side. Then she overheard another remark and stopped to listen.

"How do you suppose that fellow got killed tonight?"

"Don't know. Some said it was his own carelessness."

"How?"

"Well, I've got it figured out this way. Those Iron Men don't reach for anything unless their color is on it. If the fellow accidently shot the flashlight beam on himself—"

"That wouldn't do anything. The workers all wear green for protection," someone else spoke up. "And you'll notice

there aren't any green flash beams."

"Well, he might have had a white handkerchief in his pocket and shot his light on it. Anyhow, I know they're supposed to flash them on and *off*, not to be sailing any extra beams around. That's why they've got to be damned good. The stuff keeps coming at them like bats out of hell. One lazy slip'll queer the works. Last week it was Kerstubber. Tonight it was Hayden,"

"I heard that another guy, Holland, was the one that jinxed that number eleven machine."

"That's what *I* heard. They say he pulls in late for work. He's got a girl friend that's more important than his job."

"And number eleven's one of the heaviest freight lines in the B-Hive. It's a wonder they haven't canned him. Or maybe they figure he'll get *his*, along with Hayden and Kerstubber."

"Looks like that's what the crowd's expecting. See how they're bunched up across the way. That's number eleven they're looking down on. I was over there a while ago. He's a tall, easy moving fellow —Holland. Acts like he don't give a hang. . . ."

DORIS WHITE fled her face was flushed. She was burning up with a fever. "He got a girl friend. . . ." She followed around the wide balcony swiftly. ". . . a girl friend that's more important than his job!" She wanted to run. She wanted to get away. But involuntarily her feet took her around the outskirts of the bacony crowd for a closer glimpse of Dan.

One glimpse. That was all. Yes, it was true, he was working away as carelessly as if nothing had happened. He flashed the blue beam of his light as deftly as if he were tossing peanuts to pigeons. The big steel arm reached for the blue-lighted objects, one after another, as easily—almost as quietly—as if it were a cooing pigeon.

How could Dan be so nonchalant? Didn't he know what had happened? Didn't he know that all these people up here were talking about him—blaming him for what had happened?

Doris' ears burned. She slipped beak from the railing with furtive glances at the people at her sides. She felt a guilty terror—*she* was Dan Holland's girl friend! But no one knew. She would get away before anyone found out—

Clink! Swoosh!

The sounds from Iron Man number eleven struck panic through her. She gave a little shriek.

"Dan! Dan! She came running back toward the railing. "What was that—that noise? What happened?"

Her frightened voice was lost in the confusion. It was only by force of elbows that she made her way back to where she could look down on number eleven.

"What's the matter, Miss?" asked a rotund spectator in a hearty voice.

"Nothing," Doris said weakly. "Just a sudden scare." No, nothing had happened other than routine operations. The Iron Man had shoved off a full capsule and was beginning to load another. Dan was working away blithely, apparently unaware of the crowd two balconies above him.

"Oh, Dan!" Doris was suddenly sobbing, much to the puzzlement of a few persons who heard her. "Do be careful, Dan!"

"That must be his girl friend," someone mumbled, as Doris found her way toward a balcony exit.

CHAPTER IV

An Early Morning Conference

DORIS didn't go home. There was no use trying to go to sleep tonight. The best thing to do was to go to work. The restaurant which she and her mother managed was less than two blocks away. That would be Dan's coffee refuge as soon as he was off. Very well. She would go over and relieve one of the waitresses on the night shift.

Business was slack. There was much too much time for thinking and worrying. But the night's news brought no more alarming reports from the B-Hive. Perhaps things were not so bad, after all. Perhaps Dan's work would go on as usual.

However, there would no doubt be an investigation. There was one question that would have to be answered. Was Dan Holland in anyway responsible for what had occurred?

Morning brought Doris an answer to that question—in a very unexpected form. It came from the lips of Jacobs, the night-shift boss himself.

Jacobs and the two other men came in at six—an hour before Dan's shift would end. They settled at a corner table and Doris

brought them water.

"Nothing just now," said Jacobs. "We'll order later."

The men resumed their conversation.

"Why here?"

"It was Ben Gleed's idea. Off the main main avenue. Out of sight of the publicity hounds. Gleed'll be here in a few minutes."

"Okay."

After a short impatient wait during which the small man with the blue necktie full of tiny monkey-wrench designs chewed his cigar somewhat nervously, and the baldish man made pencil marks on his paper napkin, Ben Gleed arrived.

The four men drank coffee and talked. Doris refilled their coffee cups and talked trembling with awe to be in the presence of the famous Ben Gleed.

"Gentlemen," said the handsome young city manager. "We're in a spot. The Oil Center delegation will be here this afternoon. They'll visit the B-Hive at three o'clock. We don't want any log jams. And by heavens, we can't afford any more industrial accidents. This B-Hive tragedy is going to give us a terrible black-eye."

The silence was heavy.

"What's the matter with your machines, Harrington?" Gleed turned the question on the small dark man, a supervising engineer. "Can't you locate the trouble?"

"The regular inspections don't show up anything. I haven't had time to work them over personally. My opinion is that the difficulty is with the workers. Sooner or later we're going to need new trained men from the outside."

"Our old point of difference," Gleed muttered. "I still maintain that we can develop workers for every job without reaching outside our city limits. But that's neither here nor there. Our problem is immediate. Today is a crucial day. This Oil Center visit will be headlined all over the country. And you know Oil Center!"

THE men nodded. They knew, as all important Super City officials knew, that in spite of Gleed's efforts to be friendly and fair, the Oil Center spirit was one of jealousy and enmity.

"Our freight exports are at a new high," Gleed continued. "Thousands of contracts are being lined up for next year. The world knows that we fill orders and ship goods at record speed. The B-Hive is the very heart of our trade arteries. Any more leakage of the heart might have fatal consequences. If these Oil Center delegates should witness any stupid blunders on the part of our workers," Gleed looked straight at the red-faced Jacobs, "or our machines," turning his eyes on the small, dark engineer, Harrington, "we'd never hear the last of it."

Ben Gleed arose; the others followed his example.

"Who's on Iron Man number eleven now?" Gleed asked sharply.

"Dan Holland," Jacobs replied. I'm going to dismiss him as soon as I can get some new men lined up. It isn't easy. Eleven takes clever handling. It's like an old automobile that nobody can get along with but the driver."

"Then why dismiss Holland?" Gleed asked, pausing to pay the checks.

"He's back of our trouble," said Jacobs. "Kerstubber got smashed up because he couldn't stand the overtime. Holland was late."

"What about Hayden?"

"Well, that was mainly nerves," Jacobs grudgingly admitted. "Still, Holland was back of it, in a way, since it was the Kerstubber bang-up that shot the fear into these number eleven men. What's more, I heard Holland scaring some of them with sabotage talk—as if someone might be slipping a screw loose on number eleven on the sly. All in all, I'll feel better when Holland is scratched."

"Just as you say," said Ben Gleed. "Send your papers direct to me—"

The four men, having hesitated at the door to finish their talk, started out. Then a sharp feminine cry of "Wait, Mr. Gleed! Please!" made them turn. They were somewhat disconcerted to see the pretty blonde who had waited on them, wearing such an expression of pleading.

"Please, Mr. Gleed," Doris' trembling fingers extended. "Please don't fire Dan Holland."

Gleed gave her a look of sympathetic interest. "What is Dan Holland to you?"

"He's—he's a customer—here at the restaurant—regular—"

Ben Gleed smiled. "You'll get another customer, I'm sure."

"And—and he's my boy friend."

"You'll get another boy friend," Jacobs barked. The other men laughed, though Ben Gleed didn't share their jest. His quizzical smile faded.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. Then he

and the others were gone.

THIRTY minutes later Dan Holland trooped in, steaming and high spirited from his night's work. He was so surprised to see Doris at this hour of the morning that it would have knocked his cap off, he said, if he hadn't already lost it.

He drank coffee and ate toast with one hand, and patted Doris' arm with the other; and she smiled and tried to pretend she hadn't been crying. He knew she must have heard about Hayden and been worried.

"Don't waste any worries on me," he chuckled. "I know how to take care of myself. If Jacobs had a few more number elevens like me he'd be all right."

Doris turned away. Dan rambled on, explaining what a time he'd had dashing to work, and how he'd saved time by slipping in the visitor's entrance and descending over the sides of the balconies in spite of ripping his shirt and stepping in chewing gum and crashing into bristling Snickson the clean-up man and how Jacobs couldn't say anything about not checking in, the regulation way, because it was an emergency.

"And all the time I've been thinking of you, honey," Dan said. "I've had an awful feeling that people are blaming me for what's happened. I've noticed it in the way Jacobs and the other workers have treated me, ever since that night Kerstubber got banged up. Even the visitors up on the balcony—somehow I can just feel that they're saying things about me. But all the time I keep saying to myself, 'Doris doesn't believe those things. *She* knows I'm okay.' *Look* at me, honey. What's the matter?"

The girl's eyes filled. She could not meet Dan's questioning gaze.

"Doris! I'm not kidding myself, am I? You *do* believe in me—don't you?"

"Oh, Dan—"

"Answer me, Doris!"

"Dan, they're going to fire you!"

"*What?*" Dan Holland could have taken a bolt of lightning as easily as those words. "*Fire* me? *Me?* Who said so?"

Before Doris could answer, the restaurant door opened and in walked Jacobs. He sauntered over to the counter, placed his hand on Holland's shoulder. For all the effect his gesture had, that shoulder might have been part of a stone statue.

"Holland," said Jacobs, "You've got to go back and take over this next shift. The regular man's sick."

"You mean he's scared?" Dan answered icily, meeting Jacobs' eyes.

"He's so sick he can hardly stand up. Go over and relieve him at once. Official orders." Jacobs stalked to the door, then looked back to make sure Holland would come through.

Dan Holland laid down his fork, put a coin in Doris' hand.

"Official orders," he muttered, and marched out.

CHAPTER V

Oil Center Gets an Eyeful

AT one o'clock the afternoon shift went into action. The continuous rumble of coasting capsules, the swoosh of sliding boxes, the relentless clank of the Iron Men, made this afternoon no different from any other, to all outward appearances.

Shortly after three o'clock, ten starchily dressed delegates from Oil Center walked into the visitors' gallery, led by City Manager Ben Gleed. Here and there Gleed spoke to a workman or a guard. He hoped that his guests did not miss the point: City Manager and workman were on a common level. The spirit between them was democratic and friendly. Ben Gleed even wore a green workman's uniform.

"This way, gentlemen." Gleed led the delegation down a flight of steps to the engineers' balcony. "This will give us a closer view of the mechanisms."

Over doorways and along walls were such slogans as, "When Goods Stops Moving, Money Is Lost!" "Keep it moving!" "No trespassing on engineers' balcony." "Keep this walk clean with dust absorbers." "Danger! Wear green or dark clothing only. Danger!"

"This, gentlemen, is the B-Hive," said Gleed, as his party gathered by the railing. They stood within reach of one of the huge steel shoulders that thrust the Iron Man's arm back and forth. They could smell the oil and feel the heat and see the crescent edges of the cluster of electric eyes that guided the powerful strokes.

"Nowhere in the world," said Gleed,

"will you find a plant which better illustrates the modern efficiency ideal—goods must never stop moving."

Some of the men nodded, some exchanged envious glances.

"These capsules can load a freight train in ten minutes. That's the reason the world snows us under with orders. The King of Egypt can radio us an order for air-freight delivery, and within fifteen minutes his order will pass through this B-Hive, shoot out to the freight field by pneumatic tube, and be on its way."

The visitors murmured uncomfortably. One of them, fascinated by the ominous exhibition of power grinding away near his elbow, asked, "Are we—*safe?*"

"Of course," Gleed retorted.

"We heard that a man was killed last night—"

"Correct. He got careless with his flashlight beam. It's the same as walking into a speeding car. Regrettable. Unpreventable."

"Could those damn things reach us up here?" The questioner looked down the long jointed steel arm to the glistening metallic fingers as they gracefully picked up a piano.

"They could," Gleed smiled, "but they won't. They only go where the operator's flash beam makes them go."

Gleed's assurance didn't entirely dispel the murmurs of worry. One dignitary took Gleed by the sleeve and said in a low voice, "Remember you've got a mayor and four aldermen and a director of health and sewers in this party. I hope you've warned your workers to be doubly careful with those lights."

"They'll be careful," Gleed laughed lightly. The party moved on, past Iron Men numbers eight, nine, and ten. Over number eleven Gleed paused momentarily. Anger flashed through his face. "One moment, gentlemen, and I'll be with you. Just move right on—"

GLEED stepped into a balcony doorway, motioned to a guard. "Get me Harrington."

A few moments later Harrington, the small dark superintendent of engineers, came up briskly, scowling over a cigar.

"Harrington," Gleed snapped, "what's the meaning of this?" He jerked a thumb toward the operator of number eleven. "Isn't that Holland, the night shift man?"

"That's Jacobs' doings," said Harrington. "He sent both the day shift men home—sick."

"*Both!* Then Holland—"

"Holland's doing his third straight shift. Jacobs said no one else was available. Holland's the only one that was up to it."

"Three straight shifts—my stars! That's *suicide!*"

Harrington nodded and sucked at his cigars, satisfied that this matter was outside his authority.

"We need to import more workers—"

"No time for that talk," Gleed snapped. His eyes were watching the figure below him—Holland. The workman's arms swayed with a practiced rhythm, the blue flash came and went, the Iron Man swiftly answered every order. But the subtle signs of Holland's desperate fatigue were unmistakable.

"Harrington, take over that sight-seeing party for me—*wait!* What about the safety controls?"

"Snickson, the clean-up man, just now finished a round of the balcony, and I left him at the controls—"

"With instructions?"

"Yes—to cut off all power if there should be an emergency." Harrington added with a hint of arrogance, "you don't anticipate an emergency, do you, Mr. Gleed?"

"Certainly not." The two men caught up with the waiting party, and Ben Gleed introduced Harrington. Inwardly he hated to entrust this delegation with Harrington; promoting friendship was not one of the tart little engineer's specialties. However, the group received him cordially. Ben Gleed made a swift exit.

At the first telephone Gleed dialed for Jacobs.

"About Holland—this morning I agreed to let you fire him."

"Well, I—"

"I gave you permission to fire him, not to murder him. Three shifts straight, Jacobs, that's murder!"

"Hell, what could I do?" Jacobs complained. "The other men are scared of the machine. They're scared of sabotage. After a day of rest they'll get over it. And I figured if Holland was fool enough to keep going, we might as well get everything out of him we can before we—"

"Jacobs, that not Super City! You get over here and finish this shift yourself. That's orders!"

"Me!"

"Report in uniform in fifteen minutes or you'll be deported!"

JACOBS made it in ten. He went directly to the work station that Dan Holland had been holding down almost continuously for the past sixteen hours.

"You're a pal," Holland uttered weakly, placing the flashlight in Jacobs' hand. Then the young operator, staggering, freight-drunk, relinquished his position and backed away.

In the shadow of the Iron Man's moorings he paused, leaning against a steel girder. His eyes swept the scene. There were a few visitors on the upper balcony, as usual. That girl hurrying along the railing—the one in the green outfit with the red feather in the hat—must be Doris. Yes—she was looking for him.

What was she coming for, thought Dan. Did we have a date? No, nothing of the kind. She's through with me. She's lost faith. Damn, I'm dizzy. What time is it? Must be around three or four—

His thoughts were turned sharply by the sight of the Oil Center visitors trailing along the engineers' balcony, the small dark figure of Harrington in the lead.

Then into Holland's dizzy panorama of moving freight, streamlined balconies, a plodding delegation of sightseers, and Doris, came another detail—an unnatural sight that chilled his blood.

In the clutches of Iron Man number five was a green-clad body!—swinging high!

The arms and legs of that body fought wildly. The workman's screech pierced the noisy air. But Iron Men did not heed screeches, they only heeded light. By some freakish accident, perhaps, Iron Man number five was repeating the trick of Iron Man number eleven. It wedged its victim into the capsule of freight, clinked the lid, swooshed the capsule into the pneumatic tube—

Blang! Blang! Blang! The alarm bells set up a terrifying clangor.

Almost simultaneously Iron Man number eight swung down with savage action, hooked its claws around a green-uniformed operator! The operator dodged, squirmed, reached for the check lever. He wasn't swift enough. The claw closed around him. He cried out. The flashlight fell from his hand.

At once everyone in the big room was in a panic. Death was striking—here, there everywhere. Number fifteen emitted a murderous cry as he was hoisted through the air. Number eighteen felt the check lever fly out of his fingertips as the blind power swung him aside, dumped him into a capsule. Swoosh—swoosh—swoosh! Off the capsules shot on their merry way to death!

"What the hell's gone wrong?" Dan Holland roared. "Who's on the safety controls?"

Dozens of other workers were shouting the same thing. They were dodging the grasp of steel fingers, ducking back out of sight of the electric eyes, fighting to reach for the check levers.

"Off with the power! Off with the power!"

Their shouts were less than cricket chirps, compared to the storm of steel and the rumble of piling-up freight.

Three swift impulses raced through Dan Holland's mind, faster than three tracer bullets. The first was to find Doris. She was wearing green—and the wild Iron Men were suddenly going for green! But Doris was two balconies up—surely out of reach—

But there was the Oil Center group, huddled like sheep in a storm, on the engineers' balcony. If the Iron Men went for them—God! What a scandal! Oil Center would have Ben Gleed up for murder! Why the hell didn't Harrington chase them around to a door instead of just standing there helpless? On impulse, Dan Holland pictured himself scurrying up there and taking charge—

But the third impulse countered this plan. No, he would dash to the farther end of the big room, pull the safety switches, cut off the power!

Under the flashing of impulses Dan Holland stood paralyzed. The boldest action seemed too slow to combat this swift-spreading catastrophe—

"Dan Holland!"

THE bark came from Jacobs. The freight was piling up on him. His flashlight hand was trembling and so was his voice.

"Holland! C'mere! Take over, dammit! Can't you see—"

Holland turned to see what made the night boss check his speech and grow red in the face. All he saw was Ben Gleed

flying past, bounding toward the farther end of the room.

"Help! Help! Holland!" Again it was Jacobs' bark. Dan Holland saw the threat of death swoop down. He saw the tough fingers of Iron Man number eleven snatch the night boss around the middle, saw the red-faced man swing off his feet, ride toward the waiting capsule.

In that instant Dan Holland leaped out of the paralysis that had momentarily bound him. He struck the check lever squarely. Iron Man number eleven went dead, holding the squirming, kicking Jacobs in mid-air. There was something piteous about Jacobs' cry; it was more a cry of outrage and fright than pain.

Then it changed to an angry bellow. Jacobs' face went purple with rage.

"Holland, you scoundrel, get me down from here!"

Might as well bellow at a racing greyhound. Dan Holland was off on some weird mission of his own. Jacobs' bugging eyes blinked and batted. What the devil was that young son-of-a-gun up to?

Whatever it was, Jacobs had a ringside seat—if hanging in the clutches of a dead Iron Man can be called a seat. He could see the wild rampage of Iron Men all over the industrial arena. He could see workers, less fortunate than himself, falling into capsules and shooting off into oblivion and death.

But the strangest thing that Jacobs saw was the dizzy, prancing chase of Dan Holland across the arena. The young workman ascended the outer edge of vast freight cone, turned with it, scampered over piles of freight crates like a human skyrocket, dashed down toward the rampaging Iron Men like a foolhardy warrior challenging a phalanx of monsters.

What was he shouting? Jacobs couldn't hope to hear, but he saw one of the workmen answer *by tossing Holland a flashlight.*

Holland snapped the beam on, scrambling out of reach of an Iron Man. Then he did the strangest thing of all. He aimed the shaft of light squarely at the cluster of Oil Center men on the engineers' balcony. He deliberately flooded them with light.

Two Iron Men answered that signal. Simultaneously the two powerful steel arms reached upward, claws ready. Closer—closer—so swiftly they plunged that not one of the men had time to cry out in protest—yet every man saw that the flash-beam that swept them was guiding the hands of death—

Blackness!

Upon the whole vast room it fell, as if the world had suddenly come to an end. Utter and complete blackness it seemed. Only after a moment's adjustment to the change could Dan Holland's eyes see the piercing shafts of light from the few flashlights that were still burning.

Everything stopped—all the motion, the pandemonium, even the cries of terror. The B-Hive's power was off. Everything was at a standstill—everything except the incoming capsules of freight. Their gentle familiar rumble was as inexhaustible as the thunders of a great waterfall.

Colored flashlight beams shot to the center of the vast conical floor to reveal the inpouring Niagara of freight. Dan Holland saw the avalanche of heaped boxes topple, roll. He ducked, dodged, ran for the outer edge of the cone. The avalanche came too fast. He spilled, and the tide of boxes roared over him. . . .

CHAPTER VI

Holland on the Carpet

"WHAT a run!" muttered one of the white uniformed attendants at the Super City hospital. "Ben Gleed oughta give us an hour's notice before he turns the city into a slaughter house."

"Hell, Gleed never knew it was coming," said the attendant at the other end of the strecher. "It caught him right along with the rest."

"No kiddin'." They lifted another victim out of the ambulance.

"He's down in seven-o-two, where you see all those reporters waiting outside the door. Yeah, he got sideswiped by an Iron Man. Shoulder and arm cut up a little. He passed out a couple times from loss of blood. It's in all the papers."

"The hell it is. I been too busy ridin' the ambulance to see a paper. What do they say caused it?"

"Panic. That's Harrington's version. He's one of the head engineers and he saw the whole thing. He lays it to a machine scare and too much pressure. Says the Holland case was the thing that set off the workers' nerves."

They rolled their first-aid patients onto

an elevator. At the mention of the name "Holland" one of the patients, a tall young workman in a green uniform, opened one eye—the other eye was too black and swollen to open.

"The Holland case had nothing to do with it," the patient growled. Then he reached into his coat pocket and fumbled for his pocket comb, but the attendants told him to take it easy and do no unnecessary stirring until that broken leg was set.

Later in the evening an attendant carted Holland into room 702.

"Here's the man you asked for, Mr. Gleed. The doctors are through with him and he's still got enough life in him to talk."

Ben Gleed, propped up in bed, turned his sharp penetrating eyes on Dan Holland. He waited until the attendant had closed the door before he spoke.

"Holland, I can't waste words." Gleed's voice was brittle. The pallor of his face, together with the cold light in his eyes, indicated that he had neither the strength nor the humor to be patient with anyone. "The tragedy and the humiliation of what has happened will stink to high heaven. You had a share in it, Holland."

Dan Holland met Gleed's glare, said nothing.

"You were slated to be fired. You knew it. Was that why you tried to wreak criminal revenge on Super City?"

"What revenge?" Holland asked through tight lips.

"Don't hedge, Holland. The only way Super City can come out of this jam is through a swift shake-up in personnel. That shake-up will come in the next twenty-four hours—and it won't miss you, Holland. Don't try to deny what everybody saw. You deliberately directed death and destruction toward the Oil Center men, our guests!"

"Were any of them killed?"

Gleed noticed the tense eagerness in the young workman's face. Fortunately, no."

Holland relaxed. "I thought not."

"What are you implying?"

"Just this," said Holland. "Those Oil Center men came to see our freight plant go into a log jam. They enjoyed the show as long as it was our workers getting smashed up. But the instant the danger turned on them—well, someone on their side put a quick end to the dirty business by cutting the power off."

BEN GLEED'S eyes narrowed and he gave a low painful groan. "That's a long stab in the dark, Holland."

"I'm beginning to see daylight, Mr. Gleed."

"Daylight, huh?" Gleed contemplated the stern young face, the desperate eyes—one of them swollen and blackened. He noted the leg in the cast, a sharp reminder that this worker had risked his life for *something*.

For what? Ben Gleed was in no mood to trifle with traitors or fools or clever evaders. Within a few hours the knife of his purge would strike. It must cut clean. But before he could make head against the flood of suspicions he must find the answer to two questions: Who was the heroic person that had succeeded in cutting off the power, thereby stopping the catastrophe? What diabolical motive had led this man Holland to try to turn the catastrophe upon the Oil Center delegation?

Now, as Gleed studied Holland's tense face and pondered his sharp remarks, both his questions took on an inverted relief.

"If you can see daylight through that black eye of yours," said Gleed, shuffling to one elbow, "you might tell me what it looks like. Give me your own story, Holland."

"Well—" Dan Holland hesitated. His story was long on hunches, short on facts, and studded with insubordinations. But what had he to lose? "I suspect Harrington was back of it."

"Can you prove it?"

"No. No more than I can prove that Oil Center came here to see it happen. But when things went wild I noticed that Harrington didn't lead the party away. He herded them into a corner and let them watch. Gave them an eyeful of Super City at her worst. Seemed to take for granted that they were safe from danger."

"So you suspect Harrington."

"Yes—of engineering the whole catastrophe, and of being the authority that has played Jacobs for a sucker. I think Jacobs is innocent. He's just dumb enough to be a tool for a saboteur." Holland breathed a little easier, having gotten a load of insubordination off his chest.

"You haven't told me a thing yet," said Gleed. "How was Jacobs a tool?"

"By innocently playing me for a sucker. He was conscientious enough, no doubt

when he got in the habit of pinning the blame on me for everything that happened. He couldn't forget that I was late for work once. He's a bear on punctuality. But someone higher up—Harrington is my guess—worked on him. Jacobs soon thought is would settle all his grief if he could give me the rap. In the meantime the gang tried out their sabotage on my machine and got by with it."

"First you accuse Harrington," said Gleed skeptically. "Now you're accusing a *gang*. Suppose there *is* a gang. What makes you think Harrington is in on it, and Jacobs out?"

"Because Jacobs doesn't wear monkey wrenches on his neckties," said Holland. Then noting a slight smile on Gleed's lips he added. "It sounds silly, maybe. But there's been lots of thick hobnobbing among a few men that wear monkey wrench designs on their neckties or their watch charms. Those ties aren't made in Super City, by the way. I've taken the trouble to inquire."

AT this point Gleed rang for an attendant, had him put in a telephone call for night-boss Jacobs to come for a conference. At once.

"Now, Holland," Gleed resumed after the attendant was gone, "I'm going to have to agree with you on one thing, at least. The monkey wrench is a symbol of a gang. I've been on the trail of that gang myself. I know where its support comes from. Oil Center. I tell you this because you have made your position clear. All my efforts to appeal to the respectable business and civic interests of Oil Center haven't stemmed the tide of the racketeers. But this deal is the end. From now on it's war. We won't stop till we blow Oil Center's reputation to atoms. When the people get the facts, they'll never speak the name of Oil Center again without holding their nose. I'm telling you this, Holland—"

Ben Gleed grew white with surging indignation. He was weak from his injuries, and for a moment acted as if he were going to faint. Then a little pale color came back to his face.

"I'm telling you this, Holland, because I know you now. I know you're going to fight with me. I need you."

Dan Holland breathed a long deep draft of hospital air. He felt a little faint himself.

"But we've got a tough nut to crack before we can get anywhere," Ben Gleed resumed. His eyes roved toward the ceiling. "Not one of my trusted experts has been able to find a single clue to explain the rampage of the Iron Men. I know Harrington's explanation—a panic of fear on the part of the workers—is tommyrot. Harrington's scheme is to hire workers from the outside as fast as I'll let him, so that some fine day when everything is going full blast, he can suddenly throw monkey wrenches into every machine in the city. But how the devil did he work his black magic on the Iron Men?"

"I've got one more streak of daylight," said Holland. He casually drew from his pocket some little transparent sheets that might have been bits of candy wrappers. "Snickson the clean-up man and I had a head-on collision the other night, and some sheets that looked like cellophane flew out of his pocket. Later I found that a bit of chewing gun on my shoe had picked up a few of them. I pocketed them—and then—"

"Yes?" Gleed's eyes were bugging with curiosity.

"And then forgot about them." Holland tried carefully to change positions, but his broken leg was too heavy with bandages and pain. "But while they were working on my leg a few minutes ago, I amused myself by touching these things to the electric light. The result was interesting. I'll show you."

He applied a corner of the transparent stuff to the glowing light bulb of the bed lamp. Gleed watched eagerly. In a few minutes the sheet responded to the warmth, gradually turned yellow. For several seconds it remained yellow, emitting a glow of color. Then it melted, seemingly into water, and evaporated, leaving no trace of a stain.

"Snickson, the clean-up man," Gleed muttered to himself. "He dusts the electric eyes."

"Naturally the action is slower within the electric eyes of the Iron Men, since the heat is far less. But obviously a color filter set for a blue beam will change its preference to green during the interval that the yellow mixes in."

"No wonder," Gleed commented, "that the Iron Men became so partial to men in green uniform."

"Then there are other colors, as well," said Holland, shuffling the transparent sheets.

AN attendant came in bearing a note for Gleed. It was from one of his secretaries. It said:

"In answer to your request, I have sought out the hero who succeeded in turning off the power. He is Abel Snickson, an employee of the B-Hive. Do you wish me to confer a reward upon him?"

Gleed snorted and read the note aloud to Holland. Then he scribbled his answer at the bottom of the note:

"No. I'll reward him myself. Have Jacobs bring him up."

The attendant started out, then stopped at the door to look back.

"A young lady to see you, Mr. Holland."

"Send her in." It was Ben Gleed who gave the order.

Then while they waited, Ben Gleed picked up his bed phone.

"Chief of Police," he said. It was a few seconds while connections were being made. Gleed shifted impatiently about in bed and groaned and eyed Holland calculatingly between groans. At last, connection made, he spoke swiftly, decisively.

"Send up a squad of police to make an arrest at my room, Super City Hospital. Then send out all your men and round up every man in the city wearing a monkey-wrench symbol on his tie. Arrest Harrington, chief of engineers, on a charge of conspiracy against Super City. Yes, I'll sign the warrant myself. And I want a warrant for the arrest of Abel Snickson, the man you are going to arrest here, for murder . . . make it for Kerstubber . . . that'll be enough to start. But we can pin every death in the B-Hive on him, on the evidence I've got."

Gleed hung up as Doris entered.

Doris' face was tense, frightened. She recognized Gleed at a glance and felt sure she was intruding upon something far more serious than an official reprimand. She knelt at Dan's side, started to pour out her fears in a choked whisper.

"Dan, I couldn't wait any longer to tell you. It's all settled. I've made mother give her consent. Even if they fire you and deport you, I'm going with you, Dan. You'll need me more than ever. You'll let me, won't you, Dan—you'll forgive me for the way I acted?"

Dan Holland looked at her and smiled.

"You might state your case to Mr. Gleed."

Doris turned and started to speak, but the manager of Super City didn't give her a chance.

"No unnecessary pleading, there, my girl. Your boy friend settled his fate when he turned his flashlight on my Oil Center visitors. That brilliant bit of headwork was what stopped the rampage."

Doris' eyes suddenly filled with tears of joy. She didn't know what it was all about, but all at once the black clouds seemed to dissolve. She gave Ben Gleed a little kiss on the forehead that brought a little color to his cheeks. He wasn't expecting a kiss. Dan Holland was—and he wasn't disappointed.

In fact, Dan scarcely knew when Jacobs limped in to face Ben Gleed.

Immediately behind him was Snickson, and behind them both came two blue-coated Super City Policemen.

"Wait a minute, Snickson," said one of them roughly. "We've got a warrant for your arrest."

Snickson whirled, his pasty face going even whiter.

"W-what for?" he stammered.

"Murder," said Ben Gleed from his bed. "The murder of Kerstubber, to start with."

Snickson's jaw dropped, and then suddenly he began to whimper.

"Take him out," said Ben Gleed in disgust.

Gleed turned to Jacobs, who stood in ludicrous bewilderment.

"Jacobs, this man you wanted to fire has helped me with a little investigating which may develop into a full-fledged purge within a few hours. Holland and I have called you in to ask you a few questions."

Doris discreetly excused herself from Dan's side. She saw from the movement of Ben Gleed's eyes that he expected her boy friend to have a share in this conference.

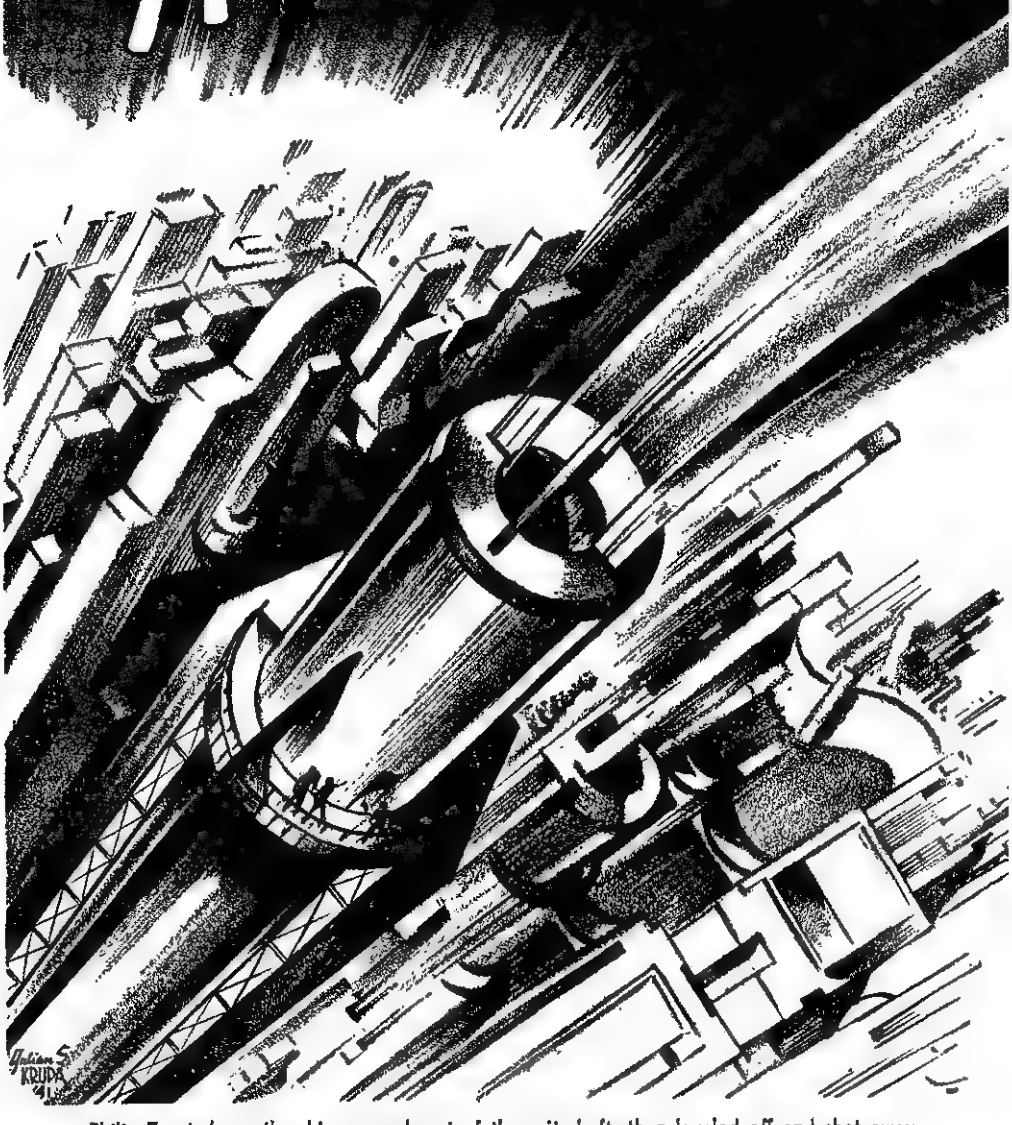
"Holland," said Ben Gleed, "I feel a little faint. You take over and give this man the works."

"Sit down, Jacobs," Dan Holland snapped. "I've got several things to say to you . . ."

And while her boy friend proceeded to give his night boss the works, Doris White sat inconspicuously in a visitor's chair—just far enough away to catch Dan's winks every time she snapped a tooth out of his pocket comb.

And when he wasn't groaning, Ben Gleed was grinning.

THE FATE OF ASTEROID



Philip Trent drove the ship upward, out of the exit shaft, then leveled off and shot away

13

by William P. McGivern

When Philip Trent, Federation agent, went to Asteroid 13 to investigate a rumor, he nosed into plenty trouble!

PHILIP TRENT, Federation agent, peered closely at the large photographic visi-screen erected before the controls of his trimly efficient space patrol ship.

Asteroid 13 was coming into mooring range.

Trent, alone in the small space craft, threw a lever and the repulsion rockets set up their rhythmic racket, decelerating the light-like velocity of the ship to mooring speed.

Asteroid 13, member of a tiny group off Venus, was due for its annual Federation check-up.

Trent picked up a televised report marked, ASTEROID 13 and glanced at it. Nothing very unusual. Abounded in Pelysium, the metal essential to all space craft construction; owned outright by a Venusian combine; and—last notation—mining foreman killed last week. Details vague. Something to check on.

Trent tossed the report to one side and set the automatic mooring apparatus. He looked more like a scientist or a chart keeper than a member of the toughest and most efficient law enforcement body the universe had ever known—the Federation Police. He was of average height, with pleasant features and thick brown hair. He never seemed to be in much of a hurry and because of this some people had made the unfortunate mistake of assuming he couldn't move fast. Because he was slow moving and slow speaking he attracted little attention. However men usually gave a second glance to his heavy, sloping shoulders and women usually noticed his deep, imperturbable brown eyes.

13 was visible now, an oblong asteroid, a hundred miles or so in diameter. Trent sighted the tiny mooring tower and set his controls. . . .

Minutes later he was standing on the flaky soil of Asteroid 13. At the base of the mooring tower a half dozen chrome-alloy buildings had been erected. Trent

noticed, with slight surprise, another space ship, a tiny single seater, set in a ground catapult. He noticed one other thing. A heavy wire fence had been erected around the mooring tower, the ground catapult and the small cluster of chromealloy buildings. It isolated a tiny section of the asteroid, making an exclusive island of it.

He heard a sound then from the space ship on the ground. He turned as a man climbed from the small air lock door and advanced toward him.

"My name is Hawkett," the man said, "Fred Hawkett. In charge of 13. We ain't partial to trespassers I might tell you. So whatever you got on your mind get it off quick."

Trent's jaw tightened slightly.

"You're talking to the Federation now, friend," he said softly, "so talk a little less loudly. I'm here for a check-up. So make up your mind to be accommodating."

Hawkett smiled insolently.

"Sure I'll fix you up. Why didn't you just say who you were?"

"Okay, forget it," Trent said. "First, what about the mining foreman who was killed here? I want the facts on that and a few other things."

His eyes roved about the tiny fenced-in enclosure speculatively. The set-up puzzled him. Through the fence he could see some of the open surface of the asteroid. As far as the eye could reach, mining equipment was visible, the presence of the worked-out shafts marked by the huge metal lids that clamped over them.

Trent rubbed his jaw and looked at Hawkett more closely. The man was a huge, barrel-chested specimen with dark, heavy features. His eyes were peculiar. Arrogant and yet—at the same time—there was wariness and uneasiness in his expression.

"What about the foreman?" Trent asked.

Hawkett shrugged.

"Cave in. He was going buggy anyway so it's just as well. Maybe he wandered into a dangerous tunnel on purpose. Who knows?"

"That's a lie, Fred Hawkett," a voice said behind them.

HAWKETT wheeled at the sound, his face going white with rage. Trent turned and saw a tall dark-haired girl standing close to the outside of the fence, a scornful expression curling her red lips. She wore rough, frayed breeches, knee high boots and white shirt open at the neck; but even these simple clothes could not completely conceal the lovely femininity of her slender form.

"I told you to keep away from here," Hawkett said harshly, "now clear out." He advanced toward her, his heavy shoulders hunched angrily. "You hear me? Get out!"

The girl's chin rose slightly.

"Not as long as you intend to lie about my father. His death was no accident. He was deliberately killed because he was trying to save the workers and the women and children who had come here to work because they trusted him."

Hawkett's fist closed over an electric gun jammed in his belt.

"Do you get back to the mines," he grated, "or do I burn a hole through your arm?"

The girl's mouth went white at the corners but her eyes swung scornfully to Philip Trent.

"I'll go," she said bitterly, "but I didn't know the Federation had sold out to Big Bill Murdock too."

"Just a minute," Trent said mildly. "I want to talk to you. Hawkett, take your hand off your gun."

"She's nothin' but a dirty little liar," Hawkett blazed. His hand remained on his gun. "You're mixin' in something big, buddy," he said harshly, "and it ain't healthy for you."

"I said take your hand off that gun," Trent repeated, but there was something else in his voice now.

Hawkett heard it but he didn't connect it with Trent's sloping heavy shoulders and battered fists. His lips smiled.

"So what?" he said tensely.

Trent shrugged and walked toward Hawkett. There was something in his calm unhurried approach that caused Hawkett to lick his lips suddenly. When Trent was within four feet of him, Hawkett jerked his hand from the gun and lunged forward, his ham-like fist lashing out at Trent's jaw.

The blow landed high on Trent's cheek. Trent shook his head and stepped inside Hawkett's arms, his fists driving with wicked rhythm into Hawkett's body. Hawkett doubled slightly and Trent stepped back. His heavy sloping shoulders snapped around behind a right cross that flicked out like a lightning bolt and landed like a base-

ball bat against the side of Hawkett's jaw.

Before Hawkett stopped rolling, Trent turned to the girl, his features relaxing again into their usual pleasantness.

"I'm sorry about your father," he said. "What's wrong here?"

The girl glanced humbly at Hawkett's recumbent figure.

"I'm sorry about what I said. I—I was upset."

"Forget it," Trent said. He wanted to sound more gracious but words weren't his business. "What's up? And what's your name?"

"Gail O'Neil," the girl answered, reserved again. "I'll forget the apology as you wish. But you must help us. There are over two hundred miners held prisoner on this asteroid."

"Prisoner?" Trent echoed.

"YES," Gail answered, "can't you see? The ship, the tower and the televise equipment is fenced off from the rest of the asteroid. One guard—Hawkins—remains here. When it starts he'll save himself with the space ship in the catapult."

"When what starts?" Trent asked.

"I forgot," Gail said quickly, "you couldn't know. For the past six weeks internal pressure has been building up inside Asteroid 13. 13 has a gaseous core and each ounce of ore removed from the crust weakens it. In other words 13 is ready to explode. My father knew this and was killed because of it. Big Bill Murdock refuses to remove the miners and their families until the last ounce of Pelyisium is removed. The men are forced to keep up production because they know they can't leave until the ore is mined. But 13 won't last that long. The two hundred lives don't bother Murdock—it's just his precious ore."

"If what you say is true," Trent said slowly, "I'll order immediate evacuation. But how do you know so definitely that 13 will explode?"

"By the increasing internal pressure. Please let me inside," Gail begged, "and I can show you what I mean."

Trent looked at the door in the fence and then stepped to Hawkett's inert form, fished through his pocket until he found a ring of keys. In ten seconds more the girl was leading him quickly into the chromealloy office. She stopped before a switchboard covered with tiny rheostats and switches.

"Each switch controls a shaft lid," she explained. "Now watch that lid to the right of the mooring tower." With one hand she engaged the switch.

Trent watched the lid rise an inch—two—and then with breathtaking abruptness it snapped all the way open and a gusher of flame and steam shot a hundred yards into the air with a blinding flash.

Quickly Gail disengaged the switch and the lid closed ponderously against the pressure of steam and gas.

"That's an indication," Gail said, "of the tremendous pressure building up beneath the thin crust of 13."

Trent nodded.

"Get the miners together," he told the girl. "With all their possessions. I'm heading to Venus to see Mr. Murdock. I'll have a transport back here as soon as possible."

"Oh that's wonderful," Gail breathed. "I'll—we'll never be able to thank you as we should."

"It's just a job," Trent said curtly. And then wished he hadn't.

Gail's chin rose in the air.

"I won't forget that again. It's not the human lives, of course. Just the job."

Trent started to explain, but suddenly he tensed as the hissing roar of rocket exhausts blasted the silence. He dashed from the office just in time to see a pin point of light disappearing into the void.

"Hawkett," he said bitterly, "on his way to warn Murdock.

"Quick," he snapped to Gail, "get the miners and their families together. Tell 'em not to take another ounce of ore from the crust. We'll be back with a transport to pick 'em up as soon as we can."

"We?" Gail said.

"Yeah," Trent said, "you'll have to put up with me for the next few hours. I need you to tell me everything you know about Murdock and this set-up while we're arcing toward Venus. Snap it up."

Gail wasted no time. She returned in less than five minutes, having changed into a soft leather space shirt and trousers. With her was a horde of ragged, but happy, miners—women and children. They cheered enthusiastically when they sighted Trent and poured through the door in the fence to offer him encouragements. Trent looked about at the roughly honest faces of the workers and the wistfully hopeful faces of the women and children. A tight line of

muscle bunched at his jaw.

"We'll make it soon as we possibly can," he said quietly.

"Murdock's got a pretty tough gang," one of the miners said doubtfully.

"So has the Federation," Trent said briefly.

"TELL Mr. Murdock a Federation agent is here to see him!"

Trent's voice was as cold as the void itself. The trip from Asteroid 13 to this coastal Venusian city had taken two hours. Two hours which were, he knew, as two eternities to the people back on 13. The page to whom he delivered his demand disappeared through two chromeagleam doors which slid together and clicked softly after him. Trent looked briefly about the huge reception rooms with the glittering crystal walls and foamy blue marble floors and then back to Gail.

"Wait here for me," he said. "I won't be long with Murdock. Then we'll head for the commercial spaceport, to take over a transport."

He smiled at her then, with one of his rare smiles, and strode to the door through which the page had disappeared, jerked it open and strode into a luxuriously appointed office.

At a huge desk at the far end of the room sat a man who dwarfed the desk itself. His arms, resting on the desk before him, looked like massive posts and his chest looked the size of an oak tree trunk. His head was in proportion to the rest of his body and was covered with black hair as coarse as rope. His face was fat but not so fat that the hard, heavy jaw line was completely concealed. The eyes were small and black, and as Trent strode toward the man, he felt that the little eyes were boring not only at him but *through* him. The page, a slender youth, was standing next to the desk, obviously frightened.

"You wanted to see me?" Murdock asked in a gravel-throated voice. He nodded slightly to the page who disappeared silently.

"You bet I do," Trent answered. "If your man Hawkett has been here maybe you know why I'm here. In my official capacity as Federation agent I am ordering evacuation of Asteroid 13. And that order is effective immediately."

"Hawkett has been here," Murdock said, "and I sort of expected you. I didn't really expect you maybe, but I hoped you'd come. The only thing I enjoy more than a brave man is a fool, and you seem to be both, Mr. Trent." Murdock leaned back in his chair and his mighty frame shook as he chuckled. "I'm not interested in the Federation. I'm interested in Pelyisium. Asteroid 13 is not going to be evacuated as you so optimistically expect. In fact, Hawkett is on his way back to 13 with a dozen guards to see that production is maintained. Does that satisfy all of your curiosity in connection with my business?"

"It doesn't satisfy me, Murdock," Trent said quietly. "If you've decided to battle the Federation you won't be setting a precedent. A lot of men have fought us. But remember this: No man has ever licked the Federation. If you disregard my order you'll be facing the Inter-Planetary Tribunal inside of a week."

Murdock stood up, his pumpkin-like face crimson.

"To hell with your orders," he bellowed wrathfully. "Nobody gives orders to me. In two more weeks I'll have the Pelyisium of the Universe in my pocket and then I'll give all the orders." His palm slapped down on the desk across a row of buttons. "You've shot off your mouth too long about what you're going to do, Mr. Agent. Your meddling days are over."

TRENT tensed. He realized too late the mistake he had made. It had never occurred to him that Murdock was ready to defy the Federation.

"You asked for it," he barked. Wheeling, he grabbed a chromealloy chair and hurled it at the mountainous figure behind the desk. He heard a crash and a bellow of rage, but by then he was racing for the chromeagleam doors. They opened before he reached them and two stocky figures charged into the room.

Trent hurled himself at their knees. He cut under them like a scythe through tall grass and rolled to his feet like a rubber ball.

"Gail," he yelled. And then he was in the elaborate office and something like a cold hand closed over his heart. Gail was gone!

"Gail," he shouted, staring frantically about the room. A door opened suddenly on the far side of the room and Trent saw three thoroughly business-like looking gentlemen pouring in on him. Behind him

from the inner office he could hear Murdock's enraged bellows.

Trent wheeled, raced for the main doors. One of Murdock's thugs yelled something indistinguishable and moved to intercept him. Trent measured him, and, when he came into range, swung once with his right, in a chopping ax-like stroke. The man sprawled to the floor, his jaw hanging queerly.

Trent leaped over his limp form but before he could make the door a shoulder crashed into him from behind. He staggered but kept his feet, struggling toward the door dragging Murdock's man with him. The man's arms were tightening around his waist with every step. Panting, Trent whirled, shaking the man's arms loose.

He saw in split-second panoramic view, Murdock's mammoth figure in the doorway leading to the private office and the third of the thugs raising an electric gun. Before he could move a muscle a blinding flash seared his eyeballs and a piercing agonizing pain seemed to explode in the center of his forehead. Then he was lying on the floor and Murdock's mountainous figure was over him. For one terrible, bitter instant he thought of Asteroid 13 and a girl with black hair and red lips who had trusted him. Then something black and thick and inevitable settled over him. . . .

PAIN, searing and angry, wrapped its agonizing embrace about the huddled, limp figure which was stretched along the Venusian dock, legs trailing in the blue canal water. The figure moved and the legs were drawn another inch onto the dock. The figure was still then and it was moments before it moved again. When it did, the legs were drawn free from the water, and, very slowly, the figure turned on its back.

Philip Trent opened his eyes.

He saw nothing and it was minutes before his pain-fogged mind knew it was night. He lay there for minutes trying to assimilate that knowledge. It meant something to someone, he knew tiredly. The pain was localizing itself now at his right temple. Instinctively his hand moved there, touched something warm and sticky. He found then that his right eye was not open. It was closed and felt as if it were on fire.

Memory began to filter into his consciousness. Fire—heat—pain. It all fitted together somehow. He sat up groaning. His mind was clearing fast as he stared about him. He was on a dark, unused, deserted wharf dock. His clothes were dripping wet. An occasional canal cruiser hummed by, its lights visible in the blackness.

He climbed slowly to his feet and pressed his hand against his temples as the fog lifted from his mind. He had been shot by Murdock's man, evidently thrown into the canal for dead. His hands explored his pockets. All identification removed, tags ripped from his clothing.

God, how much time had passed? How long had he lain here? Two thoughts hammered into his pain-shot head. The miners on Asteroid 13 and Gail O'Neil. Maybe 13 had already blown itself into dust by now. But Gail O'Neil was still on Venus, held by Murdock's men.

Lurching drunkenly, he staggered along the dark canal front, his mind black with despair. He had been walking for several minutes when he collided with a dark figure who was mooring a canal craft to a post set in the dock.

"Watch your step, you Venusian drunk," the man growled.

Trent swayed slightly, then his hand slipped into his jacket pocket, formed a bulge there. A vague plan was forming. He knew he could expect no help on Venus; Murdock's influence extended too far. Any man he might meet could be a Murdock spy. If Murdock discovered that he lived, he would be hunted down as ruthlessly and swiftly as a wharf rat.

"Okay friend," he said grimly, "you're the man I need."

"What the—"

"Quiet," Trent said, and the chilled steel quality was in his voice. "You're going to take me to Murdock's. Know the way?"

"Yes, but," the man's eyes dropped to the bulge in Trent's jacket and he said no more. Turning he threw off the mooring line and clambered into the bullet-like canal convertible.

TRENT climbed in after him, seated himself in the rear seat.

"Gonna submerge," the unwilling pilot said surlily. "Watch your head." He flicked a switch and a steel cowling moved into place over Trent's head, converting the boat into a slim torpedo boat.

A second later the boat moved noiselessly forward and then Trent felt the nose drop

suddenly as it submerged. Over the pilot's shoulder he could see the sub's powerful headlamp cutting a bright swath through the still, blue water.

"We'll reach Murdock's water ramp in a few minutes," the pilot said later. He laughed unpleasantly. "I hope to hell you try to treat him like you done me. He'll pay you off for both of us."

Trent didn't answer. His head was throbbing painfully and the pain in his right eye was growing worse. He still couldn't see with it.

He felt the nose of the craft tipping up again and then in a few more seconds the steel cowling shot back. The boat was bobbing against a dock in a mammoth circular waterway.

Trent climbed from the boat, took his hand from his pocket, showed the glowering pilot his empty pocket, then walked quickly into one of the passages that led from the circular dock. The passage was winding and ascending and in two turns he ran into a guard.

The guard looked at him curiously as he approached.

"I'm looking for some one," Trent said, "and I wonder if—" He stopped speaking as he stepped close to the guard. He knew he would have only one chance. The guard was peering at his battered and bloody face with open suspicion when Trent swung. The blow lacked steam. The guard staggered but he did not go down. His hand clawed at his gun, as Trent leaped at him desperately. His elbow sank into the guard's throat. The guard slammed back against the wall, his head snapping into its brick-hard surface with a sickening smack.

Trent took the gun from the limp body and went on. He emerged from the spiraling passage into a large, lavishly decorated lobby. It was brilliantly lighted and quite empty. Trent shook his head and went on. Somewhere in these ornate rooms Gail O'Neil was held prisoner. And here also was Big Bill Murdock.

Halfway across the marble floor Trent heard a shout behind him. Turning he saw two yellow jacketed Venusian houseboys coming toward him.

Trent ran. His head ached horribly as he stumbled across the foyer and up an ornately decorated winding staircase. Panting, he staggered up the last steps and into a hallway.

Something exploded past him with a searing hiss. Wheeling, Trent saw one of Murdock's thugs at the far end of the corridor, electric gun in hand.

Trent hurled himself to the floor, the gun in his hand leaping into instinctive action. A fiery electric pellet *pinged!* from the gun and Trent saw the man pitch to the floor.

Scrambling to his feet Trent dragged himself up the stairway. The Venusian houseboys had retreated hurriedly when the firing had started. Trent's jaw hardened. He knew he didn't have much more time. Looking down the stairs he could see through to the first floor where the Venusians were excitedly clamoring for help. Trent went on up the stairs to the fourth floor. He heard the sound, then, of footsteps above him and he hurried down the fourth floor corridor. He tried one door and then another. It opened under his hand. He shut the door swiftly, setting the electric lock as he did so. Then, gun in hand, he looked about the room. It was just as luxuriously furnished as everything he had seen, but it seemed more like an office. There was a desk, flashaphone, dictagraphs.

He crossed the heavily rugged floor, quietly and swiftly, to another door. He opened it a crack and then held his breath as he heard voices. He crouched, ear to the door and listened.

"YOU'RE being very foolish, my dear," he heard a voice say. A hot pulse pounded in his throat as he recognized it as Murdock's. "Trent is dead," Murdock's voice resumed, "make no mistake about that. Forget him and the people on 13. What are they but the scum and riff-raff of creation anyway? A girl as smart as you are would get on very well here with me."

"I don't believe Philip Trent is dead," Trent heard Gail's defiant voice answer, "but if he is you'll answer to the Federation for his death."

Trent kicked open the door and stepped into the room, gun ready.

"You're right, Gail," he said grimly. "Mr. Murdock is going to answer to the Federation."

Murdock sat behind a large desk, his face whitening as Trent's battered and unkempt figure moved slowly toward him. Gail turned swiftly at the sound of his

voice, her face lighting with incredulous joy. Then she moved toward him, her expression changing.

"You're hurt," she said anxiously, "bleeding from your—eye."

"Forget it," Trent said. "I'm all right." He watched Murdock carefully. "Keep your hands in sight," he said, "or I'll save the Tribunal the job of exterminating you."

Murdock's ponderous fists moved into view on the desk.

"It's your show," he said mockingly. "What happens next? I'm interested in just how you're going to pull this thing. I've got about two hundred guards and employees located here in the building." He leaned back in the chair, his huge frame relaxed and confident. "It will be a very nice trick, Mr. Trent," he sneered, "*if* it works."

"It'll work," Trent said, "but if it doesn't you'll never know it. I told you you couldn't lick the Federation, Murdock. You can't lick it because it's the people. And you can't lick the people."

Before he finished speaking he heard the shouted sounds of excitement outside in the corridor. Then someone was pounding on the outer door.

"You in there, Boss?" a voice shouted.

Murdock smiled.

"It's still your show, Mr. Trent."

"Philip," Gail said suddenly, and Trent noticed she used his first name, "there's a way out I think. Before you came in Murdock was telling me how smart he was with precautions taken for every possibility. Even a quick get-a-way from the tower of the building."

"How?" Trent asked. His question was to Murdock.

"Do I look stupid enough to tell you?" Murdock laughed.

"How?" Trent repeated, and his voice was low.

Murdock looked at the electric gun in the battered hand and then at the one deep brown eye in Trent's impassive face.

"You would at that," Murdock said softly. "All right, relax. I have a catapult and a rocket taxi in the tower. But how do you intend to get up there. Wings?"

"Philip," Gail said breathlessly, "he said something about a private elatube."

"All right," Trent said, "on your feet."

Murdock shrugged, stood up.

"I'll take you up there," he said, "but you're piling up a heavy score for me to settle, Trent. I play for keeps and I'm a very poor loser."

"Move," Trent said. He was trying to conserve what strength he had left. His head was still throbbing painfully and his knees were about ready to go.

MURDOCK'S huge figure lumbered across the room to a smoothly paneled wall. His hands touched its surface and a panel slid back displaying a small elatube car. Murdock stepped in and Trent and Gail followed him. Trent kept the gun at Murdock's back.

There were pounding blows being rained against the outside door now and Murdock hesitated momentarily.

Trent jammed the gun into Murdock's back.

Murdock clicked a switch and the doors closed. Then they were shooting upward with bullet-like speed.

On the tower Murdock stepped out, his jaws clamped together like a vise. A crimson anger stained his features.

"You won't get away with this," he said harshly. His rage seemed to be growing greater as he realized that Trent and the girl were slipping away from him.

Trent didn't answer. He fought to keep the gun steady in his hand as he moved to the rocket taxi that was resting in the launch catapult. The catapult was pointed at an opening at the top of the tower. He helped Gail into the rocket ship, turned to Murdock.

"I'll see you again," he said evenly.

"I'll see you in hell," Murdock snarled.

Trent's lips smiled.

"Anywhere you say," he said.

Then he climbed into the ship, slammed the heavy steel airlock door behind him and threw the catapult lever. . . .

THE rocket taxi blasted from the tower, straight up, its rocket motors thundering into life. Trent took the controls, swung the ship back downward.

"There may be time yet," he said.

"Oh, I've prayed there would be," Gail said. "There *must* be. Those women and children and men trusted us. We've got to reach Asteroid 13 in time."

"We've got to get a space transport," Trent said. "I'm heading for the spaceport now. Everything hangs on what happens there."

He shook his head groggily and wished

it would stop aching.

"Philip," Gail said worriedly, "you're hurt. Badly. You need attention."

"So do those people on 13," Trent said. "I'm all right."

He threw the repulsion lever then as they were nearing the mooring towers of the vast, sprawling Commercial spaceport. Space craft of all description were rocketing in and out of the field range, the flickering sparks drifting from their rocket exhaust like thousands of tiny stars.

Trent set the nose of the ship in an unoccupied mooring tower, opened the air lock and crawled out on the mooring ramp. He was reaching in to help Gail from the ship when something hard jammed into his back.

He turned slowly. Three uniformed figures stood before him, guns in their hands.

"Mr. Murdock visi-phoned us to expect you," an officer said, stepping forward. He was a handsome, moustached figure, evidently a commander. He smiled. "You didn't disappoint us, Mr. Trent."

"Of course," Trent said dully, "you take your orders from Murdock."

"Of course," the officer bowed slightly.

Trent grinned wearily. Damned stupid of him to overlook that angle. Murdock had merely stepped to a visi-phone when they left and that was that.

"And the lady?" the officer smiled. "She is with you?"

Trent nodded weakly, turned to the air door of the ship.

"Reception committee," he said. "Look your best, Gail."

He reached a hand to her and she took it, crawled out of the ship. She stepped onto the ramp and for an instant Trent was between her and the officers. He felt her brush against him, felt something touch his belt and then his gun was ripped from his side.

"Keep those guns down," Gail snapped. Her small hand held Trent's gun, pointed unwaveringly at the trio of dumbfounded officers.

The officers were caught with their guns lowered. Trent stepped forward swiftly and relieved them of them.

"Of course," he said meaningly "you take your orders from Mr. Trent now, don't you?"

The commander shrugged helplessly.

"Of course," he said gravely.

Trent laid his hand on Gail's shoulder for an instant.

"Very neat," he said. He handed her another gun and kept two for himself.

"You got a space transport here?" he asked the commander.

The commander nodded.

"What you are doing is very foolish," he said, "you cannot beat Murdock. He will send fighter craft after and shoot you down in space."

"He'll have to shoot down the Federation fleet if he does," Trent said quietly. "The Federation is going to chase Murdock right out of the solar system. You fellows who've strung along with him are going to be in a nice tight spot inside of forty-eight hours. Now cut the talk. Lead me to that space transport."

"Mr. Murdock will follow," the commander said calmly. "You cannot escape. He is a terrible man to cross. He will find you wherever you hide."

"We aren't going to hide," Trent snapped. "You can tell Mr. Murdock we'll be on Asteroid 13. And tell him I said I've got a date with him that's going to be kept." He shoved the gun into the commander's belly. "Move," he barked.

ASTEROID 13 flashed suddenly into the photographic visi-screen of the mighty space transport ship. Gail closed her eyes and murmured a prayer.

"It's still together," Trent said. "We'll be mooring in five minutes."

For the past two hours, as the transport had flashed through space carrying them to Asteroid 13, they had scarcely spoken a dozen words. One thought had been uppermost in their minds. And now their unspoken question had been answered by the visi-screen. They were not, as yet, too late.

Trent set the transport down on the ground of the fenced enclosure for the mooring tower would not accommodate a craft of its size. Gail opened the airlock door and she and Trent climbed out of the ship.

The miners were thronged three deep about the wire fence and they broke into wild, delirious cries of welcome as they recognized Trent and Gail.

Trent crossed to the door of the fence and burned the lock off with a blast from his electric gun.

"Where's Hawkett?" he said to the first

miner, "and where're the guards?"

"They left 'bout a half hour ago," the miner said. "Deserted us just like rats they be. Knew 13 was about ready to go and they wasn't takin' no chances."

Trent heard an ominous rumbling beneath his feet. The flaky soil of 13 was quivering and shaking like dry leaves in a breeze.

"All right," he ordered. "Everyone into the transport. Don't delay for anything. 13 won't be here much longer. The internal pressure has quadrupled since I was here fourteen hours ago."

For ten minutes the families of Asteroid 13 filed into the transport, their faces mirroring their gratitude and happiness. At last the long line had filed into the interior of the ship.

"All aboard," yelled Trent.

"*Trent!*" Gail cried. "Look."

She was pointing into space, toward Venus.

Trent followed the direction of her hand and saw two tiny specks moving toward 13.

"Murdock's fighters," he muttered. "They'll blast the transport out of space. With their speed and atomic cannons we wouldn't have a chance." He stared at the onrushing specks for an instant, then wheeled to Gail. "Get in," he ordered, " there's just one chance."

HE followed her into the ship, ran to the control boards, set the controls on dead center for Earth. Then he released the one minute rocket charges.

"In one minute," he yelled to the miners, "the transport takes off. The controls are set for Earth. Happy landings."

Then he stepped to the airlock door and jumped to the ground.

"Trent," Gail cried. "What are you going to do?"

"I can hold Murdock up here for a while. Give the transport a chance to get away. They won't see it leave, for the transport is leaving on the opposite side of 13. Maybe if they get me they won't bother about the transport." He looked up at Gail's anxious face and winked his good eye. "Don't worry, honey. I might have fallen in love with you if I'd seen much more of you."

He started to turn away then, but he wheeled back as Gail leaped to the ground beside him.

"I'm staying," she said.

"Are you crazy?" he shouted. "Get back in that ship."

She shook her head.

"I'm staying with you."

The huge ship was trembling.

"You don't know what you're doing," he yelled.

"I know perfectly what I'm doing," she answered.

The transport trembled like a live thing and then, with a hissing roar of power from its rocket exhausts, it blasted away into space, winging its way toward earth like a mighty silver arrow.

Trent groaned. Then he looked up at the approaching ships.

"If we get out of this," he said grimly, "I'll have something to say to you. But now," he glanced at the ships gliding swiftly into 13's atmosphere, "it looks as if we never will."

The ships were within two hundred yards of the mooring tower when Gail said:

"Philip, listen to me." Her voice was as excited as charged water. "The lids, the shaft lids, the fire, the gas. Won't it work?"

Trent stared at her as if she had suddenly gone mad. He looked at the shaft lids, steam seeping from their gaskets, and then his eye swung back to the ominously settling ships.

"I get it," he said. "It's wild, hopeless, crazy, but it's a chance."

He charged into the chromealloy office then, dashed to the switchboard.

"You know 'em, honey," he said, "you pull the trigger."

Gail stepped to the board, peered over her shoulders at the ships and then swung back to the switchboard. Her eyes were bright with excitement and her cheeks flamed with hope. She waited for the space of two fast heartbeats and then threw two switches.

Trent was watching. Two shaft lids flew back, a hissing geyser of steam and flames screamed into the air completely enveloping the settling ships with a shroud of scorching flames. Trent knew that the Pelyisium alloy would not melt but it would heat. It would glow red transforming the interior of Murdock's ships into inhuman infernos.

The ship veered suddenly to the right, dodging the flames.

"Right," Trent called.

Gail threw four more switches. Four

more mighty gushers of white flames shot into the bellies of the ships, cloaking them completely in live flame.

One ship was out of control! It sideslipped and crashed into the ground, breaking several lids with its weight. A mighty tongue of flame licked out about the ship, roaring hungrily at its metal sides in a savage holocaust of heat and fire.

ASTEROID 13 was trembling visibly and Trent could feel mighty smashing repercussions beneath his feet. The furniture in the office was bouncing and rattling as the tremendous sledge hammer blows slammed against the crust of 13.

"Trent," Gail cried suddenly. "The other ship!"

Trent wheeled and saw that the other ship had landed. It had managed to swing away from the flames and settle into the fenced-in enclosure. The air lock door swung open violently and the huge figure of Big Bill Murdock stumbled out onto the ground. His grotesquely large head was seared a cruel red and his hair and eyebrows had been singed to the skull. His mad, pain-crazed eyes glared wildly about until he saw Trent.

"You did it," he screamed. "Killed my men, broke up my outfit, and now roasted me like a damned pig." His black little eyes glittered with savage satisfaction. "I said I'd see you in hell and here we are." His hand rose. The gun pointed straight at Trent. "You thought you could beat—"

Trent charged him. The first pellet tore across his arm scorching his flesh, the next ripped through his hair. And then his shoulder slammed into Murdock's wide stomach knocking the big man to the ground.

Murdock climbed to his feet. Trent moved in, his right swinging down like a cleaver. Murdock sprawled to the earth, bellowing with a wild maniacal rage. He climbed back to his feet, his eyes gleaming insanely. Trent thought of the children the man had left to die on 13 and stepped in again, his right swinging like an axe. Murdock dropped again, crashing into the side of the chromealloy office.

Trent felt Gail tugging at his arm. He felt the ground beneath his feet heaving and undulating like an ocean swell.

Murdock crawled to his feet and his piggish eyes focused on the switchboard in the office. With one leap he was into the office, his huge fist closing over the master switch that operated all of the shaft lids.

"We'll go together," he screamed. A white foam coated his lips. "Releasing all of the lids together will blow 13 to the ends of space."

His hands tense and Trent leaped—toward Gail. His good arm circled her waist, jerking her toward Murdock's space ship. He could hear Murdock laughing wildly behind him and he could hear the rumbling thunder of the ground as it rose and fell, like a mighty animal threshing in death throes.

He hurled Gail into the ship, leaped in after her. The airlock door slammed. Then a tremendous roaring detonation sounded and Trent had one panoramic port hole view of a thousand tongues of flame screaming into the air, before a mighty force seized the ship and hurled it into space.

When he righted the ship and set the controls toward Earth, he peered out the port hole. By that time it was all over. Asteroid 13 had disappeared with the eruption that had destroyed it.

Trent looked into Gail's deep eyes and his arm slipped around her shoulders.

"That's all," he said quietly. "It's all through."

"All through?" Gail repeated. "Everything?"

Trent looked down at her and smiled.

"No," he said, "there's one thing that's just started."

He bent down then and kissed her.

« « A CURE FOR JEKYLL AND HYDE » »

ANYONE afflicted with a Jekyll-and-Hyde complex need no longer chain himself to the bed at night. Surgeons are now carrying out an improved version of the procedure originally devised for the relief of schizophrenia—dual or split personality—by Dr. Egas Moniz, of Spain. The operation is known technically as pre-frontal leucotomy—severance of white matter in prefrontal lobes of the brain. Results are amazing. Homicidal tendencies have disappeared; mental powers have been regained; panic reaction due to hallucinosis came to a halt. Hallucinosis—the state of hallucination—does continue, but calm, pointed questioning will snap the patient alert. The new operative technique does not effect a complete cure, but it improves the patient's outlook enormously and makes life bearable.

Arthur T. Harris

The Observatory by The Editor

(Continued from page 6)

OUR cover this month is by J. Allen St. John, an oil painting depicting a scene from Don Wilcox's "The Lost Race Comes Back." The story itself was inspired by the painting, but the whole credit cannot be claimed by St. John, because this novel is the story which Wilcox brought in so enthusiastically for our anniversary issue.

It seems that Don saw the painting some months ago and it started a train of thought, because by a startling coincidence, the scene was exactly as Don had pictured it in a story he had long contemplated writing. Thus, the completion of it was an immediate necessity, before the cover escaped its proper mate.

Could this have been an example of that so mysterious phenomenon, mental telepathy?

Did Don, picturing this scene in his mind, impress it upon St. John, and cause him to paint it? Or was it the other way around?

Anyway, we think each man has something to be proud of. And we know you'll like both.

Incidently, John Carter returns next month, and St. John has done a brilliant new cover for it, of a Barsoomian lion.

The Motor Club's sorry they accepted his membership. He's the playboy type—always burning out bearings"

REMEMBER Ben Gleed, King of Speed? Well, he's in this issue again, with another story of Super City. What a fascinating place this city of the future is! The strangest things can happen in it, and do! Concerning future stories, your editor thinks it would be a good idea for you readers to write Mr. Wilcox a letter, telling him what you think the next Super City story should be about. Why don't you do it? We'll pass the letters on to him.

OUR newest writer, Duncan Farnsworth, is coming up fast, and his story in this issue is, we think, a fine example of a good space story. You'll find "Return of the Space Hawk" a pretty fine presentation of science fiction's oldest and most popular theme, action in space.

AT the suggestion of many of our readers, we are deserting the authors, this month, in the "Meet The Authors" department, in favor of an artist, or should we say, a cartoonist. We give you the story of Dick Shaw, our most popular cartoonist, on page 225. So this month it's "Meet The Cartoonist." We'll cover our artists in future issues, as well as authors.

JUDGING from the letters we received in the past two months concerning the articles written around the back covers by Paul, Mr. Gade has hit upon a very popular mode of presentation of these features. The breezy, anecdote form he has given to this feature has given it a popularity that ranks it as a favorite, next to your humble editor's column, the Observatory.

YOUR editor was deeply engrossed in editing Eando Binder's "Adam Link Faces a Revolt" the other day, and had arrived at the part where a building caves in on Adam and Eve Link. Suddenly a terrific blast shook our desk, and our pencil point broke off with a snap.

When we recovered from the shock, we rushed to the window to see a vast mushroom of smoke roaring into the sky. The building next to our office, housing a chemical laboratory had exploded!

It isn't good for editorial composure to have death strike quite so close, especially when we're editing a story like Binder's!

WHAT did you think of the new size type in this issue? We did it to give you more wordage (there's 162,000 words in this issue!) and just for the anniversary issue. But really, how did it strike you? We're interested in knowing.

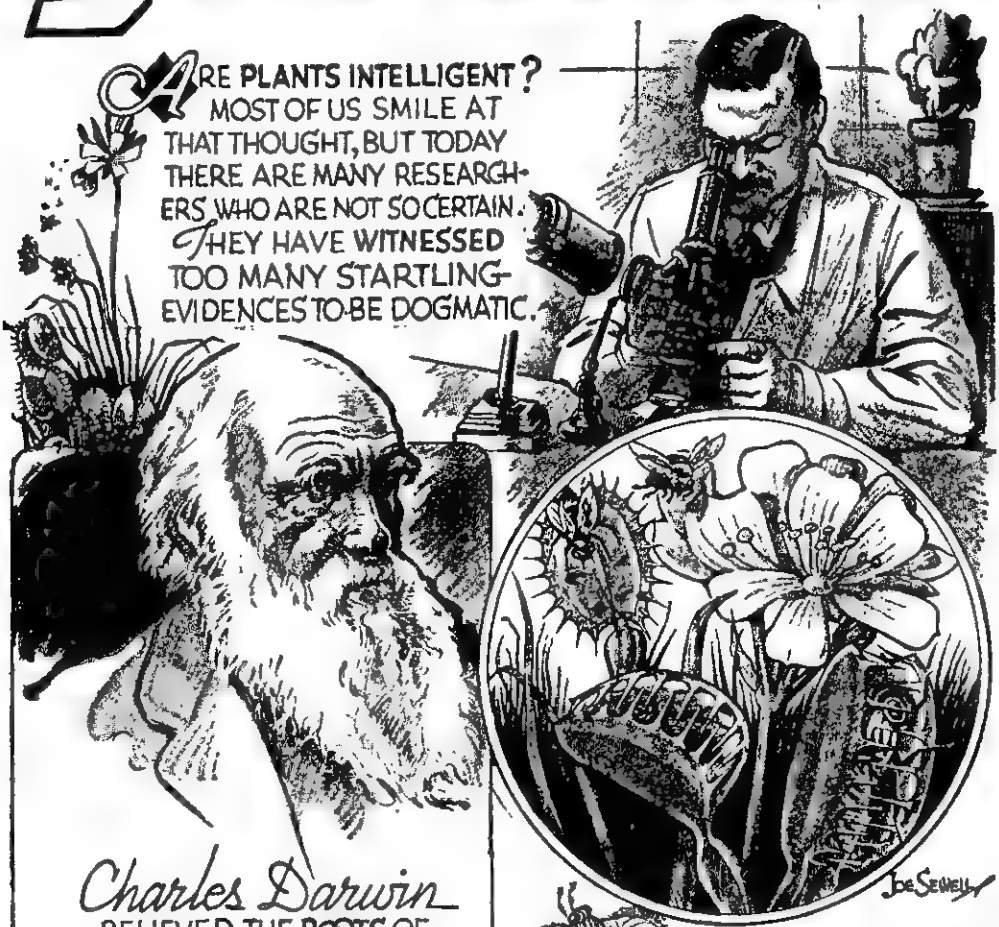
IN fact, we're mighty interested in your comments on the issue as a whole. We think we've got a pretty fine book here, and we do want to know if you agree with us.

ALL of which brings us to the end of the editorial ramblings for this month. We hope you've enjoyed our birthday as much as we have. It's been great fun.

Rap

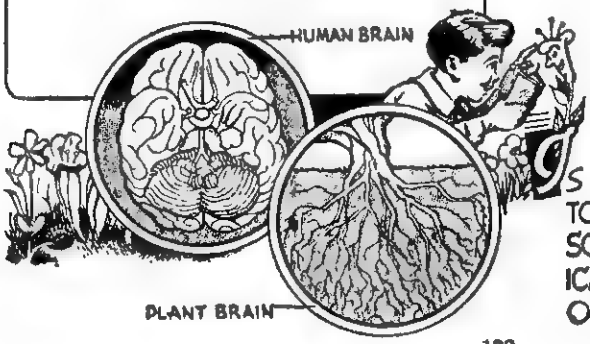
Scientific

ARE PLANTS INTELLIGENT? MOST OF US SMILE AT THAT THOUGHT, BUT TODAY THERE ARE MANY RESEARCHERS WHO ARE NOT SO CERTAIN. THEY HAVE WITNESSED TOO MANY STARTLING EVIDENCES TO BE DOGMATIC.



Charles Darwin BELIEVED THE ROOTS OF PLANTS WERE THEIR "BRAINS" AND HE PERFORMED MANY EXPERIMENTS *to* DEMONSTRATE HIS THEORY . .

IS THE VENUS FLY-TRAP'S AMAZING ABILITY TO CAPTURE LIVING PREY BY IMPRISONMENT AN INTELLIGENT ACTION? HOW EXPLAIN ITS INSTANT REJECTION OF INEDIBLE OBJECTS?



IS IT BEYOND IMAGINATION TO SUPPOSE THAT WE MAY SOMEDAY BE ABLE *to* COMMUNICATE WITH THE INTELLIGENCES OF THE PLANT WORLD?

Mysteries

PLANTS THAT THINK

By JOSEPH J. MILLARD

Is the plant world possessed of intelligence? Do plants think, reason? Are they able to control their actions?

WHEN you and I went to school, we learned, among other things, that one of the distinguishing features between plants and animals was that animals had brains while plants did not. Scientists, explorers and educated people in general showed mild amusement at "simple-minded savages" in dark corners of the earth who believed that trees and plants had souls and the ability to think, to love, to hate and to remember.

With the exception of the microscopic world where not even the best-trained scientist can say for sure which are plants and which are animals among the simpler organism, we still smile in scorn at primitive ideas of intelligent plants.

But today there is a small but growing group of researchers who are not so certain. They have witnessed too many startling and unbelievable evidences of plant intelligence to dare put forth a dogmatic denial that plants can think, reason, feel pain or pleasure, recognize friends or enemies and learn lessons from experience. No less an authority than Charles Darwin believed the roots of plants to correspond to the brain in animals and performed many amazing experiments to demonstrate the ability of this "brain" to react to stimuli.

The commonest and easiest studied evidence of plant intelligence is, of course, the characteristic tendency of almost all plants to turn toward the light. Science in general explains this characteristic very plausibly by the theory that light reacting on the cells on one side of the plant causes those cells to stop growing in order to take up the business of food production. Naturally, since cells on the dark side keep growing, this produces a twist toward the light.

This explanation is simple and plausible. Unfortunately, it does not cover all cases. When a seed is buried in the ground and commences to sprout, that sprout rises in total darkness. There is no light to influence cells and thereby direct growth. Yet, that sprout will unerringly grow toward the nearest light and will twist and turn over and around rocks and other impassable objects to reach that light. It makes no difference if the seed is planted so that the sprout points downward. That sprout will immediately turn and grow back toward the light. If the seed is planted in a cliff-side or similar place where the nearest light is at one side, rather than straight up, the sprout grows toward that light.

What weird sense directs plants unerringly toward light, even when that light cannot be seen? No one knows with any degree of certainty. But science has discovered that plants do possess genuine eyes that are fully capable of seeing in every sense of the word.

By means of interesting and fantastic experiments, a prominent researcher, Dr. Haberlandt, proved that plants can recognize different colors and different shades of light and will react in a different manner to different hues. It is conceded, as a result of these and similar experiments that plant eyes are of two types. One is a relatively simple cell structure whose function is merely to transmit light to cell nuclei. The other is much more complex. It consists of groups of papillae whose surfaces are formed into perfect plano-convex lenses functioning in much the same manner as human or other animal eyes.

BUT growing toward the light is by no means the only trait shown by "thinking" plants. Vines will consistently turn toward any suitable object that is capable of supporting their eternal upward climb.

Here, again, science has contented itself with the explanation that vines follow shadows cast by the object they are seeking. But in the first place, even the ability to follow shadows is evidence of some guiding sense that approaches intelligence.

However, the theory of following guiding shadows breaks down in too many cases to be wholly acceptable, even to the most materialistic. Time after time, tests have been made in which a vine is either entirely surrounded by shadows or else placed in such a location that no shadow falls anywhere near it. Invariably, the vine grows out and affixes itself to the desired support, regardless of light or shadow.

If one incredible experiment, a vine was set out on bare ground, totally devoid of any support for climbing. When a pole was set in the ground some distance away, the plant "saw" that pole and headed toward it immediately. Just before it reached its goal, however, the pole was moved around to the opposite side. Doggedly the vine turned and followed. Again the pole was moved and again the vine turned unerringly after it.

But eventually, after countless shifts, the vine showed a thoroughly human capacity for disillusionment. It gave up and completely ignored the pole, even when it was finally placed a tantalizing few inches from eager tendrils. Not until the pole was finally placed in the very midst of the foliage and left there did the wary plant at last seize hold and begin to climb.

Another remarkable case on record involves a *trumpet-creeper* that consistently ignored a dead tree stump some twenty feet away. Then one day a fire burned the stump, consuming all the loose bark that covered it and exposing the firm, solid wood underneath. Shortly afterward, as if sensing that at last the old stump offered a stable support, the vine abandoned its old supports and hastened to completely cover the new object.

BUT perhaps the most fantastic evidence of plant intelligence is that shown by the various species of insect- and animal-eating plants. In some of the commoner pitcher plants, the method of trapping insect prey involves no evidence of intelligence. In these, some variety of nectar is used a bait. An insect, drawn by the sweet liquid, steps onto a completely smooth "slide" and falls into the pitcher part of the blossom from which escape is impossible. One species of pitcher plant found in tropical regions, employs nectar that is intoxicating so that the insect becomes dizzy and falls into the plant's "stomach."

But many species of carnivorous plants betray definite signs of intelligence. The well-know *Venus Fly-trap* and the *butterwort* operate differently in that they have leaves that snap shut to imprison the unwary insect that touches the "trigger" bristles. When the captive fly or bee has been completely digested, the leaves open, discard the inedible remains and set themselves to trap another meal.

This much of their action might be explained without the presence of intelligence. But the astounding fact is that both these plants will immediately reject a stick, stone or inedible insect that is dropped into their trap. Certainly this is an evidence of intelligence.

Even more amazing, perhaps, is the action of the *sundew*, a fairly common carnivore growing in swampy places. In a number of experiments, a live fly was fastened nearly an inch away from the *sundew*. In every case, although at no time did anything touch the delicate trigger globules, the leaves actually *moved* out to seize the distant fly.

Besides insects, some species of *sundews* grow so large that they capture and consume bumblebees and large flies. *Bladderworts* catch and eat fish and tadpoles while some large carnivorous plants in the tropics are known to seize mice and other small animals and birds. Science is even ceasing to be too skeptical of the constantly recurring tales of man-eating plants that lurk in the farthest depths of uncharted jungles.

DOES the idea of making a pet out of a plant, a pet that recognizes and responds to the caresses of its master or mistress while shrinking from strangers, sound too fantastic? It is nevertheless an established fact and another link in the steadily growing chain of evidence that plants have feelings and emotions as well as intelligence.

Practically everyone is familiar with one or more of the various species of sensitive plants. Those native to the United States are usually small and characterized by their action of immediately folding up and drooping the moment they are touched. However, many larger varieties found in tropical countries are even more remarkable in their sensitivity.

Some of these almost-human plants will fold their leaves and apparently wither away when someone even walks near them, without actually touching a leaf. Others may be "frightened" into shrivelling by a loud noise. So fast is the nervous reaction of these strange plants that it takes no more than a second for a large plant to apparently die after a single leaf has been touched or approached. Not until the plant is certain that all danger is past will it slowly unfurl its leaves and straighten up.

One remarkable feature of this protective motion is the fact that it is always the leaf that was touched to start the shrivelling that reopens first. This leaf appears to ease itself open, thoroughly examine the surroundings and finally give the "all clear" signal that brings the rest of the plant to life in a most miraculous way.

But the real evidence of plant intelligence lies in the fact that sensitive plants can become pets. A. Hyatt Verrill, who was experimenting with sensitive plants in Panama, was astounded to find that after touching a plant a few times, it refused to shrink away from his touch but remained open and friendly. However, when anyone else approached the same plant, it immediately shivered and folded its leaves. After this amazing discovery, a number of neighbors "tamed" their plants so that they would shrink only from the touch of strangers. This experiment, repeated by a number of naturalists, is one of the strongest factors in favor of belief in plant intelligence.

However, we have all seen some evidence of like or dislike on the part of even the commonest plants. Everyone knows people for whom almost anything in the plant line will grow richly and with almost no care. We know others who, no matter how much pains they take or how hard they try, can never make plants grow satisfactorily. Experiments have been performed where

rily. Experiments have been performed where plants that grew richly for one person were given to another and, despite the identically same care and treatment, immediately withered and died.

Science is not yet ready to admit that plants recognize and feel emotions toward their growers but they are slowly accumulating a mass of evidence that points in that direction. The old belief that plants die of sorrow if an owner who loved them dies may have, after all, a foundation of sound fact.

AN oddity that science cannot satisfactorily explain but which may or may not indicate intelligence is the habit of growing in certain fixed directions. With a few minor exceptions, all vines which climb by spiralling around a pole or tree, turn in the same direction.

But the remarkable and unexplainable feature is that in the southern hemisphere, these vines always spiral counter-clockwise or from right to left. In the northern hemisphere, vines grow instinctively in a clockwise or left-to-right direction. And no one has ever succeeded in making a vine break the fantastic unwritten law of its kind by growing in an opposite direction. Not even a common morning glory vine can be tied in such a way that it won't work lose and resume its natural direction of growth from left to right.

Still stranger, perhaps, is the fact that if seeds are taken from a clockwise growing vine in the northern hemisphere and planted in the earth below the equator, the vines growing from those seeds will disregard their own heritage and start growing counter-clockwise from the first shoot. Why plants should be so stubborn about the direction of growth, no one knows but their very stubbornness implies an intelligence that knows what is right and proper for any given locality.

Of all the amazing evidences of plant intelligence, however, none is more striking than that shown by many plants in their eternal effort to reproduce their own kind.

Our own *milkwort* or wild *bachelor's* button shows startling ingenuity in perpetuating its species. At the height of the blooming season, each stalk prominently displays attractive orange blossoms. These blossoms are normal in being so constructed that insects attracted by them automatically fertilize the plant.

But the clever *milkwort* is not content to let its future rest entirely on chance. If it happens that insects do not do the job of fertilizing properly, there are undeveloped blossoms of a different nature waiting to take over the job. These ordinarily do not appear but if normal fertilization fails to take place, the reserve blossoms open up and fertilize themselves to produce the needed seeds for the coming season. Several other varieties of plants like the *houseleek*, for example, have self-propagating mechanisms held in reserve in case natural methods fail. In the case of *houseleeks*, substitute propagation is carried on by dropping leaves from which new plants spring up. So persistent is this urge to reproduce that even when pinned on a dry board, the leaf throws out shoots.

BUT if plants do have a form of intelligence akin to that of humans, there are some plants that, like some humans, seem to even possess extrasensory perception to a remarkable degree. Chief of these is the *Arbus precatorius* of India, considered one of the most amazing plants in the entire plant world.

By means of queer movements of its leaves, this weird plant accurately forecasts weather conditions two days in advance and also predicts electrical and magnetic storms, to which it seems particularly sensitive. So remarkable is the accuracy of the plant that the late King Edward VII of England, while he was Prince of Wales, set up a plant weather-forecasting station in Kew Gardens, London, which has been maintained as an important adjunct to regular meteorological forecasting. It is even said that these plants actually predicted, by their uncanny movements, an explosion of firedamp in the British coal mines that was one of the major disasters of the day.

These are only a few samples of the thousands of cases where plants seem to betray evidences of human intelligence. The whole mass of experiments and observation on the mystery is already large enough to fill volumes and is being added to almost constantly. What the final decision will be, no one can say.

But, while science is not yet ready to say positively that plants do possess reason, emotion or feeling, a growing number of botanists are approaching the study of the subject with a mind that is wholly free from prejudice. They are willing to accept the fact that plants have intelligence if their researches indicate it to be so. What form of intelligence they will find, if any, is still a mystery.

And who knows but what, somewhere in this virtually unexplored world of plant life, there are plants so highly organized in their ability to rationalize that eventually it may be possible to communicate with them, exchange ideas and information to mutual benefit?

NEXT MONTH: MYSTERY OF THE LIGHTNING—

It was nearly two hundred years ago, in 1752, that Benjamin Franklin hung a key on a kite cord and proved thereby that lightning was a form of electricity. But to this day, science cannot tell for certain where that electricity comes from, or how it is generated by nature. And that is despite the fact that science has trapped, harnessed, measured, disarmed and even created lightning in the laboratory.

You will be intrigued and fascinated by the amazing things Joseph J. Millard says about lightning in our June issue. Don't miss it. Fully illustrated and dramatized by Joe Sewell.

DICTAGRAPHS OF DEATH

by

P. F. COSTELLO

MY City Editor and two copy boys were breathing down my neck by the time I pounded out the last line of the story. I ripped the page from the typewriter, tossed it on the desk, and then leaned back in my chair and watched Joe Kirkland—the toughest editor in Manhattan—rake his eyes over the copy before shoving it at one of the nervous copy trotters.

"Move!" he snapped, and I knew the copy was good. It had to be good to get by Joe without revision.

"I'm going to be gone about two days," I said.

"Now don't be that way, Jim," Joe said quickly, "I'm going to need you around here. This is not the time to be starting out on a tear—"

"Nuts," I said, louder than I meant to. "I've worked for twenty-two hours straight on that blamed story and I need a rest. Anyway, nothing's due to break for a while. Professor Engles has been kidnaped, okay. But there won't be anything on the story now until a ransom demand is submitted to his family."

"There may not be any ransom demands," Joe said, fumbling for a smoke. "This is no ordinary snatch job. Professor Engles was working with the Defense Commission on some very important dope. He hasn't a dime of money himself. So why the kidnaping?"

"Okay," I said, "so why?"

"That's what I'm hoping you'll get to work on," Joe said.

"I will," I said.

"Fine—"

"In exactly forty-eight hours from now!" I grabbed my cigarettes from the desk, shoved them into my pocket and stood up.

When Mr. Wu said "Do not meddle," he meant it. But to a reporter, missing scientists and the Defense Program are hot news

"Every thought, every fact, is being drained from his mind, recorded on this disc . . ."

"And don't worry about your star reporter," I said reaching for my hat, "because I'm just going to drop in on my girl so she'll remember me when I meet her at the altar one of these days, and then I'm heading for the arms of Morpheus."

"Whose arms?" Joe asked suspiciously.

"Morpheus," I snapped. "The god of sleep, you wouldn't know him."

I left then and I almost made it to the door. But half-way through the reception room the receptionist called me.

"Jim," she said, "there's a gentleman to see you." Her pretty blonde head nodded to the other side of the room where a small Chinese sat watching me expectantly.

"Him?" I asked.

The blonde head nodded again and I sighed. That's one thing about the newspaper business. Every crackpot crank in the world runs to a newspaper when he things he's got a story. I don't know why they pick on me unless it's because I try and be nice to them.

THE little fellow had stood up when I looked at him and I got a better look at him. He was short and slight and wore a cutaway coat and striped trousers. In his hand he carried, very carefully, a black homburg hat. His face was bland and smooth and wreathed in a slightly silly smile and behind large spectacles, bright little almond eyes twinkled at me. He wore a cane too.

I scratched my head and decided to make a very brief interview out of it.

"Did you wish to see me?"

"Are you Mr. James Burke?" This question was accompanied by a deferential little bow that seemed, somehow at odds with the clipped, painfully precise voice and inflection.

"Yes."

He moved closer to me then and looked about carefully.

"I should like very much to talk to you for a minute or maybe two but I should like also to find a somewhat more confidential place than this foyer."

"I'm pretty busy," I said, "and—"

"It is of the gravest importance, Mister Burke," he said solemnly. "Trouble, serious trouble is near and I need your help."

They all do. To start revolutions or to finance a business or something screwy. I took my little chum by the arm and led him to the door that led to the men's washroom. He smiled brightly at me.

"My name is Wu," he said. "Mister Wu."

"Wu, eh?" I repeated. "Gotta nice ring to it. Now you just wait here for a few minutes and I'll be back." I shoved him gently into the gleaming tile washroom and then tiptoed out of the door, and out of the building.

I HAD forgotten all about it a half-hour later when I trotted up the steps of Professor Cartwright's home. I rang the bell and then tried to recall, with the usual poor results, how beautiful Joan Cartwright really was. I was always knocked for a loop when I saw her, but it was fun trying to prepare myself for it.

I rang the bell again and frowned. She might be up in her father's second story laboratory. I didn't particularly like her working with her father because he was just enough of an idealistic scientist to use her for his experiments. I didn't know what he was working on and I didn't care much. All I cared about was Joan.

There was no answer to my second ring and I began to stew. I walked across the spring sod to the front of the house and peered through the window. From the light of floor lamps I could see reflections from leather-backed volumes in the Professor's library. But the Professor's big chair was empty and his pipes were all standing neatly in their racks.

I didn't wait any longer. Calm, thoughtful deliberation is not my strong suit. I wrapped my handkerchief about my fist and then knocked a pane of glass out and crawled into the library. The first floor was quiet and—I knew in a minute—deserted.

"Hello," I yelled, "anybody home?"

I crossed the library, while my shout was still echoing through the house and started up the stairs. The second floor of the house was dark but at the end of the hall I saw a thin pencil of light, close to the floor. I knew the light came from the Professor's laboratory.

Unconsciously I felt my fingers tightening into fists. I started down the hall but before I had taken three steps, the door swung open. I blinked in the sudden light that streamed from the laboratory and then I saw that Joan was standing in the doorway, her face shadowed by the light behind her.

I felt my knees almost sag with relief. Then I grinned sheepishly.

"Any relation to Jim Burke and a second

story man is purely coincidental."

She didn't answer, but I could see her lips curve in a smile.

"You had me worried, honey," I said. "Nobody answered the bell and I—" I stopped and stared at her. "Joan," I heard my voice sharp and strained. "What's wrong?"

I couldn't see her face clearly but her body, silhouetted in the light, was swaying slightly as if it were out of control. I grabbed her shoulders and shook her roughly.

"For God's sake, what's the matter?" I yelled.

Her head rolled loosely, limply on her neck but she didn't speak. I half carried and half dragged her into the laboratory and jerked her around to face the light. Her face was blank, expressionless, and her eyes stared into mine without a trace of recognition. I slapped her face hard.

"If this is a joke," I shouted, "it's gone far enough."

One of her hands touched the angry, red spot on her cheek where my hand had struck and a puzzled, babyish expression of hurt and doubt appeared in her eyes.

"Oh God," I groaned. "I didn't mean to hit you."

I led her to a chair and watched her slump back against the cushions, her body limp and unresisting. One of her hands trailed over the arm of the chair and played idly and unconsciously with a tassle that dangled from the arm of the chair.

I jerked my eyes away from her and got a grip on myself again before I looked around the room. The chairs were overturned, the rug was twisted and wrinkled and there were four jagged holes in the floor, as if heavy bolts had been ripped from the planking. I crossed the room to the phone and snapped it to my lips. Then I saw that the wires had been ripped from the bell box.

I dropped the phone and then I noticed an object on the floor next to the Professor's desk. It was a small, leather-bound black book. I picked it up and shuffled through it. It was crammed with formulae, equations and page after page of notes in the Professor's neat, cramped writing. I shoved it into my overcoat pocket and then walked back to Joan and took her hand in mine.

"Darling," I said, trying to keep the frantic anxiety from my voice, "where's your father? Look at me. You've got to try and remember. Think, darling, please. Tell me what's happened."

She stared at me blankly. It was the most terrible sensation I've ever experienced to look at her. It was the girl I loved and yet—it wasn't. The features were the same, but they were devoid of all identity, all character and expression. It was as if a perfectly blank mask had been placed over her delicate, sensitive face.

I remembered the downstairs phone then and in a few seconds I was racing down the steps and into the alcove off the library. I picked up the receiver and in a second heard Central's sweet music—"Number Please?"

"Get an ambulance on its way," I said, and gave the house address. "Then call the police." I slammed the phone back into its cradle and hurried back up the steps. I don't know why but at that moment I was thinking of a funny little Chinese named Mister Wu!

CHAPTER II

Joan Disappears

I WATCHED the tall, white-haired neuro-psychiatrist peer into Joan's eyes and then feel her pulse and shake his head.

"In forty years of clinical research," I heard him mutter, "I've never seen anything like this."

"What is it?" I asked. "You've been taking tests for an hour now." I stared down at Joan's slender figure stretched out on the hospital cot and clenched my fists. "Can you tell me what's wrong with her or can't you?"

"You must relax," the old doctor said gently. "We don't want to have another patient on our hands. Joan's case is unique in the case literature of psychiatry. In some manner her brain has been completely drained. Memory, will, inhibitions, personality . . ." he paused and made a sweeping gesture with his hand, . . . "they've all been swept away."

"How the hell could that happen?" I asked. "Yesterday she was sane as you or me. Maybe more so."

"It isn't the question of sanity," the doctor returned wearily. "She's perfectly sane and normal, just as a two week old baby is sane and normal. I don't pretend to know what has happened, but something

—God knows what—has blotted up her entire mentaltiy. Her brain is like a sponge—squeezed dry."

I stood up then. "I'm going to find Professor Cartwright," I said. "He's tied up with this some way. When I find him I'll be able to answer some questions that I can't now."

I left the hospital room without looking again at Joan's slim, pathetically limp form.

In the hallway I bumped into a stretcher which four short, brown men were wheeling past.

"Cinder in my eye," I muttered, "sorry!"

One of them answered me and I stopped. Something was bothering me. A number of unrelated, unimportant occurrences seemed to be standing out in my mind as if they were about to fall into some definite pattern. I pulled the lobe of my ear and walked on, frowning. Hunches are things I don't ignore.

When I reached the lobby of the hospital, I slumped into a chair and did a little thinking. The one thing that I wanted to find out was if there was any connection between the disappearance of Professor Cartwright and Professor Engles. And then I wanted to know what had happened to Joan.

I noticed an Oriental bus boy crossing the lobby carrying a tray of dishes and something about him bothered me. I lighted a cigarette impatiently. And then one of the pieces of the jig-saw dropped suddenly into place.

The four men wheeling the stretcher I had bumped into were all dark, swarthy—the bus boy had reminded me of them. What the hell were Chinese or Asiatic attendants doing wheeling a stretcher about this hospital?

I didn't wait to answer that question. I shot out of my chair and raced for the steps, a dozen vague and nameless fears spurring me. I took the steps two at a time as fast as I could run. But half way between the second and third floor I heard a shrill, desperate scream and I knew I was too late.

A frantic nurse collided with me as I turned the corner from the stairs to the corridor and for a matter of ten seconds I had my hands full of hysterical femininity.

"Snap out of it," I shouted. "What happened?"

"They took her," she screamed, "took her with them. I couldn't stop them."

I dropped her and pounded down the corridor to Joan's room. One glance told me the story. A window open leading to the fire escape; the old doctor sprawled on the floor; a crimson blot staining the silver of his hair.

And Joan's bed rumpled and empty!

I ACTED fast to keep myself from thinking. I got to the window just in time to see a black limousine pulling away from the front of the hospital.

I made it back downstairs in half the time it took me to get up. There might be a chance of trailing that car if I just got a break. I was racing to the revolving door when the cops grabbed me from behind.

They weren't any too gentle about it. A big hand hooked into my shoulder and I was spun half way around into the arms of another huge, blue-coated figure.

"What's your hurry?" the big cop snapped. "We got a call over here and I guess you're our man all right. You smart guys are all alike. In such a hurry to fade that you run right into our arms."

I whipped out my press card and shoved it at him.

"Look at that," I snapped, "and get your meat hooks off me. If you blundering morons would learn to use your brains instead of your mitts you'd get better results."

"Well, gee, I thought—"

"With what?" I asked icily. Then I turned and raced through the revolving door to the street. But I was too late again. The street was completely deserted.

I cursed bitterly and fluently then and I didn't stop until I was out of breath. Joan gone—her father missing—nothing made any sense.

I was standing next to the intersection of an alley and a dim street lamp illuminated the street and part of the alley with a murky radiance. The thing was getting too much for me. There was no rhyme or reason to anything that had happened. Nothing I could sink my teeth into, to start swinging at. I turned wearily and started for the hospital. I hadn't taken ten steps before I heard the slight noise behind me.

I turned and my eyes blinked in the light and then opened wide as they focused on the small familiar figure that was facing me.

In the light of the street lamp I could see spectacles gleaming and I could see a

Homburg hat outlined and I knew that the trousers the little man was wearing were gray with a pin stripe and I also knew that beady, bright almond eyes were watching me behind a deceptively vacant smile.

I recognized Mr. Wu, the beaming little Chinese who had visited me earlier in the day.

He stepped closer to me, bowing with his shy deferential gesture.

"I am so very, very sorry," he said, and I noticed again his crisp English, "that you did not think it sufficiently important to return this morning." I could see him smiling. "That was most unfortunate, wasn't it?"

"I don't know," I said, "supposing you just do a little more talking."

"This is a very serious matter, my young friend," he said with his polite, silly smile, "and if you will allow a suggestion from one much older than yourself, it is a matter that you would do better to leave alone."

I MOVED a little closer to him, my right arm ready to swing. At last it looked like I had something definite to work on.

"Go on," I said. "Don't stop."

"Thank you," he said, with another bow, "but I must warn you not to give way to the impulsiveness of youth and allow yourself to act rashly and," he lingered only a second on the word, "dangerously."

"Go on," I said.

"My plans have been considerably frustrated," he went on, "and perhaps part of that might be interesting to you. You see I was only a few minutes late at Professor Cartwright's this morning."

I nodded and inched closer to him.

"Then," he continued suavely, "I am late here now. The girl is gone and that is a great disappointment. I had such hopes of finding her here. But she is gone; that I see in your face. Mr. Burke," there was a metallic edge to the smooth voice, "please be so good as to relax."

I looked down and saw that a small thirty-two revolver was pointing at about the middle button of my vest. I relaxed and my respect for Mr. Wu went up a point. I hadn't seen him draw that gun.

"So," he went on blandly, "we come to the important matter. The black book. Will you please be so good as to hand it to me, Mr. Burke?"

"What book?" I asked blankly.

Mr. Wu smiled.

"So droll of you," he said in his liquid tones, "to feign ignorance. Perhaps I can refresh your memory. Look in your outside coat pocket, Mr. Burke. The top of the book is visible to me."

I jammed my hand into my pocket and felt the leather bound book. I pulled it out, remembering it for the first time. It was the book I had picked up in the Professor's laboratory. There was nothing I could do. I handed him the book.

"What's that got to do with everything?" I asked.

Mr. Wu looked distressed. "I am sorry that you do heed my so excellent advise. This matter is very involved and very treacherous and I wish you would not concern yourself with it. It grieves me extremely when my advice is disregarded. Do you understand, Mr. Burke?"

"Yeah," I said drily. "You're mixed up in the disappearance of Joan and Professor Cartwright and probably Professor Engles. I'm going to make it a sort of lifetime hobby to see that you swing for abduction and maybe murder. That's what I understand."

"The younger generation," Mr. Wu's smile beamed broadly, "add garrulousness to brainlessness and call the mixture bravery. Very peculiar, but very common. A last entreaty, Mr. Burke. You are dealing with things of which you have no knowledge. Things which are black and dangerous—for everyone. So I beg of you —before you are *too* deeply involved—stay clear."

Suddenly his eyes flashed over my shoulder and the smile wiped itself from his face.

"Fools," I heard him mutter. "They will never learn."

He flung himself into the shadow of a small shrubbery and I saw twin streaks of orange belch from the tip of his gun. I wheeled and saw a black car sliding to the curb. I started to run but before I could move three feet, I was thrown to the earth violently by an assailant from behind. I struggled furiously until something pounded into the top of my skull.

CHAPTER III

Morea Khan

THE next thing I remembered was pain. Pain that traveled up and down in my

body in engulfing waves that seemed to smash into my head and roar and fizzle there for hours at a time.

Then I opened my eyes and the effort was almost too much for me. I closed them again and tried not to retch.

"No serious after effects I trust?" the voice sibilant and smooth cut through my befogged senses like a whistling lash. I winced and opened my eyes again.

A thin, grotesque figure stood before me, a cold smile playing over his dark features. He was a toweringly tall man, gaunt to the point of emaciation. His plain sack clothes hung on him as if they were draped on planks. His face was wide and flat but no one would ever notice his face as long as they could see his eyes. They were black and fathomless wells that reflected now, sadistic, humorless mirth.

I stared at him for an instant, and then as the events of the last few hours came surging back into my memory I straightened up in my chair and felt the top of my head gingerly.

"Does it hurt?" the gaunt spectre asked solicitously.

"I wish the guy would try it again," I said, "from the front."

"Sometimes we are forced to take measures that are repugnant to us," the tall figure bowed slightly.

It sounded phony as hell to me. "What is it you want?" I asked bluntly.

"Nothing but a little information, namely, the whereabouts of a certain, small leather-bound black book."

"You missed the boat," I said. "The book is gone."

"I am Morea Khan," the tall figure said with a curious smile. "I know that you had the book, but I don't know where you have hidden it. I am giving you the opportunity to tell me. The cause for which I have labored decades will not be impeded by an obstinate tongue, I assure you. I have already gone to great lengths to secure that book, but I have met with disappointments. I warn you my patience is running short. The girl didn't have it, so you must."

My hands gripped the arms of the chair.

"What was that you said?" I asked thickly.

"The girl didn't have it," Morea Khan repeated sharply. "What—"

He never finished that sentence. I left my chair like I was shot from a catapult, driving straight for that scrawny throat. The man responsible for Joan's condition, for Joan's disappearance was within reach of my hands and that was all I asked.

But I didn't figure with that whop on the head I'd got. It must have taken a lot out of me because my knees buckled, almost throwing me forward on my face. But I caught myself in time and let a long looping right fly at Khan's moon-like face. It landed and the tall, stringy figure toppled, backward, a strangely shrill cry of pain and rage escaping his teeth.

I tried to follow up but something had happened to my arms. They seemed to weigh tons and before I could lift them my legs gave way and I felt myself sprawling on the floor, the pain rushing into my head again. I didn't pass out because I could feel Morea Khan kicking me in the ribs, and then I felt his arms around me dragging me over the floor. The next thing I knew I was sprawled in the chair again, my head ready to explode.

WHEN I opened my eyes I got a slight satisfaction from the dark swollen bruise on Morea Khan's cheek and the thin trickle of blood that ran from his lip.

"That was foolish," he said, dabbing at his lip with a silk handkerchief, "and you will regret it. You might as well know that escape from here is impossible."

"Where is this joint?" I asked.

"About thirty miles from the city. It is ostensibly the home of a wealthy importer. The suspicions of your stupid police are completely lulled. It is as well armed as any fortress. The walls are electrically charged. Sentries patrol the grounds armed with sub machine guns. We could stand off an army here quite comfortably. It is maintained by the cause. No expense has been spared in making the entire estate impregnable."

"Kidnaping's a pretty serious business," I remarked. "You've got several of them to worry about."

"It is not I who worry," Khan returned, "but you."

"You got something there," I said.

"Where is the black book?" Khan asked again and this time his voice sank to almost a whisper.

"Is this a game?" I asked. "You know who got the book. Probably one of the guys working for you."

"You lie," Khan hissed.

I didn't like that.

"Now listen, you comic opera emperor," I said. "A little guy with a silly smile took the book away from me. A little guy with striped trousers and a black Homburg."

I hadn't been looking at Khan while I was speaking and when I raised my eyes and looked at him I received a shock. He was sagging against his desk, his saffron skin becoming a mottled shade of green.

The breath was whistling in and out of his lungs as if they were made of wicker.

"You are lying," he said hoarsely. "He can't—you are making this up."

"His name was Wu," I said.

Morea Khan stiffened and then jabbed a buzzer on his desk. He waited as if in a trance until two monkey-like little brown men bounced into the room. Then he turned to them and rattled off a string of words in some foreign tongue. The effect on the two men was startling. They backed away from Morea Khan, their brown skins lightening. Then they looked carefully around them and bowed low and backed from the room.

Morea Khan seemed to have regained his composure. The mirthless, sadistic smile was playing around his lips again.

"There are many things you could tell me," he said, "inasmuch as you know of Mr. Wu. There are many colors in the tapestry I see that do not blend. Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated and will not be unrewarded."

"Go to hell," I said.

Morea Khan's fathomless black eyes glowed strangely and an inscrutable, satanic smile twisted his features.

"You will be more obliging in a short while," he said smoothly. "You will talk. Ah yes, you will talk. And when you start you will never stop."

It wasn't the most pleasant thing in the world to listen to.

"What's the gag?" I asked, trying hard to sound as if I didn't care.

"You will see," Morea Khan said politely. "If you will accompany me into the next room I shall show you the little device that will spur you to loquacity."

He started to turn and then he paused, listening. In a second I heard it too. The wild, lonely baying of hounds.

Khan was frowning.

"My little pets," he said, "are uneasy."

He strode to the wall and lifted a phone off a hook.

"Inspect the grounds," he ordered. "Check everything . . . listen and you will know why." He hung up the phone a minute later and when he faced me again I could see that he was smiling slightly. "It is nothing," he said, "so don't allow your hopes to rise. Merely a passing tourist car that attracted the attention of the hounds."

A minute passed and I said nothing. A tourist car could go a long way in a couple of minutes. But the hounds were still baying. Khan did not notice but I kept listening and hoping as the weird, incredibly eerie baying of the hounds moaned through the air.

CHAPTER IV

The Mind-Draining Machine

MOREA KHAN stepped to the door, still holding his automatic trained on the middle of my skull. He shouted something over his shoulder, and footsteps shuffled down the dark hallway. Then two of his Eurasian-men-friday were beside him. Khan said something else to them, his grin exposing that row of gold teeth, and they stepped toward me.

The dark little Asiatics grabbed my arms before I could make a move. Not that I might have wanted to, however, for my head was splitting from that blow I'd received hours before. I went along docilely enough as the procession—with Khan's tall, gaunt frame leading—wound down a series of darkened stairways and through several more halls.

I was trying to make my brain function through the haze of pain that blurred my eyes with every step I took. Trying, in some fashion, to put the pieces of this damnable puzzle together. Some parts were fitting, but only the obvious ones. It was obvious, for example, that Joan was here in this vast mansion—somewhere. I could take Khan's word for that, I was grimly certain. But the gaunt Asiatic thug hadn't mentioned Professor Cartwright. However, unless the old man had been dispatched before now, he must also be somewhere around here, Khan's prisoner.

And the mysterious Mr. Wu— There didn't seem to be any manner of fitting him into the puzzle, yet. There was the black book, of course. Mr. Wu must have been in possession of it at this moment. Even

though Morea Khan wasn't particularly pleased about it. I wasn't certain that Khan believed my story about the black book, and as we turned down the last flight of stairs into a sort of dank cellar, I had the definite feeling that Khan suspected I knew what the contents of that book were—even though I didn't have it on my person.

Another thing that was sickeningly evident was that my lean and hungry wolfish chum, Khan, was probably going to do a little plain and fancy probing on me for information about the book.

I didn't know a thing about it. In fact, Khan really must have known more about it at that instant than I did. However, even if I'd known every last syllable, I felt certain that he wasn't going to drag a word out of me.

We had stopped in the darkness of the cellar passage, and were standing before a great iron door. Khan had some keys which he was fumbling with, and in a moment the door swung inward and one of the Asiatics flicked a switch that threw the subterranean chamber into a sudden brilliance. I gasped involuntarily. The place was a large, clean, elaborately equipped laboratory!

I was inside and jammed down into another chair, the little Asiatics standing guard over me, when I heard other steps outside. And then a second procession filed through the door. A procession of three little thugs—looking identical to the Asiatics who stood guard over me—escorting a tall, gray, lean figure in badly wrinkled and slightly bloody tweeds. It took me less than three seconds to recognize that man. For I had seen more than a hundred pictures of him in the last twenty-four hours. It was Professor Engles—the Einstein of electricity!

KHAN must have been watching my face closely, for he grinned again, those gold teeth gleaming. And drawing his breath in sharply, he said:

"So, Mr. Burke, you recognize our prisoner, eh?"

I couldn't say a word. Even if there had been anything to say, anything worth saying. It was just as though a heavy boot had just kicked the breath out of me. Engles—so this explained his disappearance!

Everything was wheeling around so wildly in my brain that I wasn't able to do anything but stare glassily at Professor Engles. The old man seemed drugged. At any rate, he didn't look right or left, didn't even seem to notice Khan or myself. He just slumped down in the chair they shoved up behind him, staring dully ahead.

And then the little Asiatics were rolling some equipment out from behind a screen in the far corner of the laboratory. A thing that looked at first glance like a cross between a dental chair and the Hot Seat itself. Wired, with a dome-like headpiece over the top of it.

"We don't need the black book to use this properly, as you might know, Mr. Burke," Khan hissed softly. "However, if Professor Engles' mind is ever to be restored, so that we may use it further, the book will be necessary. I'll leave that up to you—for the moment."

It was still Alpha and Omega to me, so there wasn't anything I could say in answer, even though Khan was evidently expecting me to say something. I just sat there, glaring at him, trying to figure it out. Then they were fooling with the machine. They rolled a cart-table up beside it. A table on which there was apparatus closely resembling one of those home-recording instruments they sell with radios these days. It was a sort of gigantic dictagraph, with records that were at least five times the normal size.

The little Asiatics, under Khan's direction, hooked up the cart-table dictagraph with the strange chair. At one point during the hooking-up process, Khan turned to me and gave me that golden grin.

"Professor Cartwright is a clever man, eh, Burke?"

At last the equipment seemed to be arranged to suit Khan, and he gave a clipped order, that resulted in Professor Engles' guards pulling him up from his chair and dragging him over to the wired seat beside the dictagraph. They clamped him into this with remarkable ease, for he made no attempt to struggle. Then they slid the headpiece down over him.

"Perhaps you have never seen Cartwright's very remarkable invention in operation, Mr. Burke," Khan said. "This should be an interesting demonstration, in that case."

More clipped, swift orders in that strange dialect, and the Asiatics jumped around like monkeys on a stick while Khan took his place beside Professor Engles who was now

strapped helplessly in the chair. Khan's clawlike hand touched a lever beside the dictagraph, and a record-wax began revolving swiftly on it. Then his hand slid to another lever.

"We had to drug Professor Engles to keep him quiet. But it should work well, nevertheless," he smirked. And at that, his hand threw down on the second lever.

Instantly the room was filled with a peculiar buzzing, and for a split second the lights in the laboratory seemed to dim. Then, incredibly, Professor Engles was talking!

It wasn't the man's voice that startled and shocked me. It was the tone of it—monotonous, and robot-like, droning! Professor Engles was rambling, almost incoherently, like a child reciting a very lengthy and terribly stupid verse!

THE words he said were jumbled, and yet they weren't, they were like the conglomeration of news broadcasts, conversations with friends, snatches of songs that a man might hum inwardly. It was weird, ghastly, somehow spine-chilling!

And then figures began to tumble from his lips, figures that mingled with the other stuff, formulae, and more mumbo-jumbo of everyday expressions and sentences. And all the while, the big wax record on the cart beside him kept whirring around and around. And then I began to see. The machine was recording all this, everything Engles was uttering!

I must have been sitting there open-mouthed in the astonishment I felt. For Khan, grinning mockingly at me, said over the muttered words of Professor Engles:

"Your acting, if it *is* acting, is very commendable. As you undoubtedly realize, Mr. Burke, the Professor is being drained—syllable by syllable—of every last bit of conscious and subconscious information that has registered on his brain since infancy. The brain, as you undoubtedly realize, has a perfect record of every last fragment of knowledge possessed by its owner. Professor Engles has a very valuable brain, with especially valuable knowledge, for our Cause."

My disbelief must have been still stamped on my face, for Khan continued.

"Every word uttered by the Professor is being impressed on the wax record you see beside him. Then, since the information from him is being drained from this present year *backward*, we will play our record in reverse, once we have our information, and thus have access to every last scrap of knowledge gained by the Professor—*in logical succession*—since the time of his childhood."

But for the last few words I hadn't been listening closely to Morea Khan. My mind had been filling in the gaps in the puzzle as quickly as his words segmented them. The "Cause"—this was the third time that he had mentioned the word. And since the arrival of Professor Engles it was apparent that the old scientist now sitting in the chair and being drained of his knowledge had especially valuable information which Khan wanted, for the benefit of a mysterious "Cause!"

I looked up and saw Khan's cold eyes regarding me curiously. Obviously, he was still undecided as to how much I really knew about the whole thing. He had deliberately fed me scraps of information in an effort to draw some outburst from me that might show him where I stood.

But I tore my eyes from Khan's mocking gaze, and tried desperately to concentrate, tried to shut out Professor Engles' monotonous muttered recitation. This machine was Cartwright's, of course; that was apparent by now. I'd known, naturally, that Cartwright had been working on something or other for the past two years, but since it had been obviously none of my business, I'd never gotten nosey. But Khan, knowing of my closeness with the Cartwright family, and of my engagement to Joan, hadn't been at all certain of what I knew especially after my having accidentally fallen upon that damnable little black book.

Engles was now perfectly worked into my jigsaw. His work with the National Defense Commission on a new weapon was reason enough for Khan and his "Cause" to bring the old Professor here. They wanted knowledge about that weapon—and with Cartwright's machine were getting it. All of which fitted Joan and her father, Professor Cartwright closer into the jigsaw. With a machine such as Cartwright's, anyone using it to such a devilish advantage could tap the greatest brains in the world and gain access to an utterly incredible fund of knowledge. For any outfit labeling itself as a "Cause," this power would be terribly important!

And suddenly, through all this, the

thought that had been plucking insistently at my subconscious, hit me with a wallop. Joan—for the first time I realized what had happened to her, why she had been in the complete coma when I found her. It was crystal clear now, sickeningly so. Joan had been drained of knowledge in precisely the same fashion that Professor Engles was at this moment!

And suddenly, I became conscious of the room again, and of Khan grinning like some ghastly devil. The noise that had jerked my mind back to my surroundings had been a sudden, queer, high-pitched whine.

CHAPTER V

I Go Into Action

ENGLES' face had grown deadly, sickeningly white, and his lips were moving at an utterly astonishing rate of speed. So fast that they were a blur of motion. And the whine was coming from his lips!

Khan's gold teeth were exposed in a grin once more.

"I have adjusted the rheostat on this device to a much greater speed. At this rate, Professor Engles is imparting ten years knowledge in less than a minute's actual time. Of course, in replaying the record, we can slow it down to whatever pace we desire. The blurred, whining sound you hear is nothing more than Engles' words blurring into one another as he speaks faster than any man has ever spoken."

I had to say something, although it would have been mad to move. The Asiatics were still standing guard over me. Both had guns and were far enough out of reach to make the prospect of trying to disarm them an impossible one. But I had to say something.

"Damn your stinking hide, Khan!" I shouted.

But the yellow devil only grinned goldenly at me.

"You will take Professor Engles' place in this machine once he is finished, Mr. Burke. I have decided that I can obtain all the information I want from you in that manner."

I had expected something like that, and was about to snarl something in reply when there was a sudden rattling at the iron door that led to the cellar pasage. Khan wheeled, then moved to the great grilled door, throwing a latch and opening it slightly. A voice, high and slightly hysterical, shrilled something in that strange dialect, and Khan answered sharply. He slammed the door, turning to me.

"We are interrupted," he said, trying to keep his voice silken, although I could see uneasiness in his opaque eyes. "You will be taken back to your cell upstairs. I'll take care of you later. Some slight disturbance has occurred outside the grounds of the estate. If, by some chance, it might be anyone seeking you—" he broke off ominously. Then he went on. "We have several thousand sticks of explosives hidden under the grounds and the house on this estate. The explosive is controlled by a central switch. Miss Cartwright, her Father, Professor Engles, here, and yourself, will all be blown to Hell if it appears as though there is the least likelihood of our being discovered. Remember that, Mr. Burke, if you please!"

And then Khan barked something at the two Asiatics who stood guard over me. A moment later, and he had darted out into the cellar passageway—evidently going out to see what the trouble was. I was wondering about it myself, when the two guards jerked me to my feet and began to propel me to the door—obviously on instructions left by Khan. The door closed behind us and we stood in the dank, dark passageway, and the scene in the laboratory was cut off as if by a stage curtain. But back there, I knew, poor Engles was still being drained dry of knowledge by the dictagraph, while Khan's lackeys stood guard over him.

We were moving along, a guard on either side of me, and in the darkness I stumbled once or twice. The second time I stumbled, I must have kicked a loose pebble that rattled hollowly in the cavernous passage. It startled my squat captors, and they peered excitedly ahead. Which gave me my idea. If their nerves were beginning to get sleazy—now was the time to act!

MY cigarette case was still in my pocket, and I wasn't noticed as I reached back for it. It was too dark, and besides both my captors knew that I'd been disarmed. Then the case was in my hand, a silver thing, rather large. Even under the circumstances I hated to think of parting with it. Joan had given it to me two years ago.

I held it behind my back as we marched

along through the darkness. The stone walls were damp, and close enough to reach out and touch. Close enough to hit with a cigarette case, even throwing it with a high, backward, backhand flip—which I did at that instant.

The clatter of the case striking the stone sides of the wall was like an unexpected fire gong—and instantly, just as I had hoped, both my captors wheeled as one, peering excitedly back through the darkness!

This gave me my chance. As they wheeled, I turned too, but stepped back six inches, extending both hands wide to grab their smoothshaven skulls. I don't think I ever put as much *uuuuumph* into anything as I did to the yank I gave those two skulls as I brought my arms together. There was a nasty "crack" as their heads collided, and they slumped down at precisely the same time—both out cold!

In something less than a minute, I had taken both their guns, jamming one in my pocket and holding the other ready for trouble. Then I got their keys, and for an instant I looked back at the great iron door behind which Engles was still held captive. But I knew I didn't dare chance barging back in there. There were two more guards with him, and Khan and the others might be coming back at any moment.

I did pause long enough to tear a few shirts apart and bind and gag the two unconscious little yellow men who lay at my feet. Then, sweating icily, I dragged them back into a darkened corner and got on my way. Speed was what counted now. And plenty of it.

It was hit and miss, as I groped my way through the upper sections of the huge house. And there was no telling when I'd run into one of Khan's little grizzly gnomes. Room after room, one by one, I used the keys that I'd taken from my captors, and I finally hit a winner, barging in on Professor Cartwright—tied and gagged, and lying stretched out on the floor of a bedroom!

I had his bonds untied in less than a minute, and he sat up groggily, rubbing his chafed wrists and ankles and fighting for the breath that the gag in his mouth had taken away.

"Give it to me fast, Professor," I told him. "We haven't a lot of time, and this isn't the grand delivery, yet. There's still a swarm of yellowjackets running around this diggings, and we're liable to be greeted by some of 'em at any minute. Where's Joan? Do you know where they're holding her?"

"Jim," he began. He was badly shaken, bewildered. But I had to cut him short.

"There's time for that later," I said urgently. "Come on, try to stand. Here." I pressed the automatic I had in my pocket into his hand. "You'll need this. Now, again, where's Joan?"

Professor Cartwright was a little, sawed-off man with white hair and a perpetually inquisitive glance. He would have looked funny standing there holding a gun and looking grimly bewildered if the circumstances had been any different. But they weren't.

"I'm not certain," Cartwright said, "but I think she's on this floor. I got a glance of her through an open door along the hallway outside when they were bringing me up here!"

"Let's get going then," I barked.

THERE was no one in the hall, as yet, when we stepped quickly out of the room in which they'd been holding Cartwright. With the set of keys I'd stolen, we began moving along all the doors along the hallway. There must have been at least fifteen of them in addition to the one in which I'd found Cartwright. Suddenly Cartwright snapped his fingers.

"I remember, Jim. It's down at the end of this hall, the very last door. Was too dazed to recall it until now. But I'm certain she's in that room!"

He was pointing about twelve doors down the hall, and I was suddenly thankful. This would save us a lot of time. In ten seconds flat we were down to that door. And in that instant later we had thrown it open and stepped inside. I didn't know quite what I'd been expecting to see, so of course I held the gun ready. I think Cartwright was waving his automatic around, too, but I can't recall exactly, for the shock of the sight that met our eyes left me cold all over.

The room was empty!

But Joan had obviously been in the room, and recently. The unmistakable odor of her perfume hit my nostrils immediately. And in addition to that, a broken piece of coral bracelet that belonged to her was lying on the floor. But no Joan—that was the thought that choked my heart in a sudden, awful wrench!

Cartwright started to say something, and

I'll never know what it was, for in the next split-second a shot slammed out in the hallway and a bullet whined less than a foot from my ear and splattered into the wall behind me!

I dived to the rug, dragging Cartwright down with me, my finger instinctively squeezing hard on the trigger of the gun in my hand. I don't know if I hit anything, but I was aiming in the direction of that shot, and my gun was kicking hard, spitting orange streaks in the right direction. The noise and smoke and confusion was astonishing.

Suddenly the smoke cleared enough for me to catch a quick glimpse of three little Asiatics darting to the shelter of doorways along the hall. And in a moment later the three were blazing forth from their hasty barricades, their shots *panging* too accurately for comfort.

It was during all this that I squirmed my way out of range, old Professor Cartwright inching right along beside me, to a spot where I was able to make a rising leap for the wall switch. My hand caught the button, and we were given the instant advantage of inky blackness to conceal our movements.

There were three more shots, then, followed by a ringing silence. A silence that seemed to last an eternity, and made the flesh creep along the nape of my neck. I could hear Cartwright breathing softly beside me, and I turned my head a little to whisper.

"Wonder what in the hell they're up to?" I hissed.

"Ummmnnnh," the Professor muttered back. "Wish we knew."

"I don't like it. Another three minutes of this and they can round up everyone in the joint to start potting us out of our hole!" I answered.

But I was mistaken, or so I thought, for the shooting broke out again an instant later, and we were kept busy rolling out of the way of splintering plaster. Cartwright was shooting now, and I had a second to marvel at the way he used a gun—carefully, but with efficiency. We were saving our shots, by unspoken agreement. However, we had to return every fourth or fifth bullet to show them we were still on the job. Much more of this and our guns would be empty.

The din was terrific, and it was certain that Khan was in on the fun by now, for he couldn't have missed the noise. I was speculating on this, and wondering how many of the yellow devils had ganged up in the hallway there—when the walls caved in and everything went inky!

They must have used gun butts to do the trick, the lads who had crept stealthily in through the window of our room—while the gunplay was going on!

CHAPTER VI

Welcome, Mr. Wu!

SOMEONE was sloshing water over my face, and it was ice-cold and quite unpleasant. Voices murmured in the background, hazily at first, and then more clearly. A great, white, hot light seemed to be tearing my eyelids apart. And then I regained consciousness.

Morea Khan stood over me, an empty glass in his hand. One glance showed me that we were back in his cellar laboratory, and that Professor Cartwright was also present. The old man was bound and gagged, strapped in a chair directly opposite me. I was pigtied in the same fashion. But I wasn't gagged. There were seven of Khan's Asiatic flunkies standing around the dictagraph machine.

The flunkies moved slightly, giving me my first clear view of the machine. Professor Engles was still strapped in the wired chair beside it. He was dead. Morea Khan, the baldheaded yellow devil, must have seen the horror that sprang to my eyes at the sight of Engles' body.

"Unfortunate, Mr. Burke, that I had to leave my boys in charge of the machine. The disturbance at the gates to the estate was but a trifling one, but by the time I returned to the laboratory, my able assistants had permitted Engles to die. However, not before the record was made. A pity." But even as Khan's words hissed to a polite ending, I could see that his cockiness was vastly shaken. The short, but healthy fight which Cartwright and I had made of it must have scared hell out of him.

"What's the pitch?" I snarled. "Why didn't you get rid of us when you had the chance upstairs?"

"There is still a certain question, the answer to which I think you know," Khan said ominously. "Professor Cartwright, over there, refused to divulge the knowl-

edge. Unfortunately, our methods of persuading him to do so resulted in his losing consciousness for the moment."

I glanced quickly to the old Professor. I hadn't noticed it until now, but he was out—definitely. One look at the soles of his naked feet was enough to make me want to vomit. The unconsciousness which had come to ease the pain had been a blessing for him. Then Khan must have read my thought about the dictagraph machine.

"Perhaps you wonder why I did not put Cartwright in his own device, and thus obtain the information?" he asked silkily. "The answer is simple. The information we want is contained in the black book, the one I, er, mentioned to you before. If we'd risk Cartwright's life in the machine, and fail to get the information, we would never be certain of obtaining it."

"And what do you want from the book?"

Khan smiled evily at my question. "It is the revitalizing process by which the effects of the machine are repaired, by which the brain information grooves are restored in the individual who has been sapped of his knowledge. Through it, we will be able to use our information guinea pigs again and again. Very important to the scheme in which the Cause intends to use our, er, borrowed scientific knowledge. It was a shame, for example, that Engles had to die. We could have forced him to work out further formulae for us."

"So?" I tried to dig up every last ounce of scorn for the word.

"You can tell us where the book is," Khan's voice contained an ominous hint of what he intended to do if I *wouldn't* talk.

"I told you before," I shouted, "I was relieved of the damned thing by—"

I didn't finish that sentence, for at that moment the iron door swung open, and someone stepped into the laboratory. That someone's voice said politely:

"By Mr. Wu?"

THE entire room seemed to hang suspended in a shocked silence, while all eyes gazed askance at the figure standing in the doorway. It was as perfectly a timed entrance as a Barrymore might have demanded. But this wasn't Barrymore—it was Mr. Wu!

He was smiling, that same silly little smile. He still wore his frock coat and striped trousers, but his homburg hat was missing. His almond eyes peered pleasantly out from behind his spectacles, and his gloved right hand held a gun, quite unwaveringly, on the entire room.

Cartwright and I were bound, and Engles was dead. Consequently Khan nor any of his henchmen were displaying fighting ware. You could see Mr. Wu's sharp little eyes noting all this with satisfaction.

"You all have weapons concealed on your person. Do not attempt to reach for them," Mr. Wu declared, and his voice was like a host's asking guests to stay for tea. "Please move more closely together," he added, waving that gun ever so slightly. Khan's thugs shuffled closer, and Mr. Wu, with never a trace of fear, moved over to them. Calmly, one-by-one, he took their weapons. He deposited all these in a neat little pile at his feet.

"That is better," he said. "Much better. Now please untie the bonds of Mr. Burke."

The Asiatics behaved as though they were hypnotized, and even Khan, glaring wildly at Mr. Wu, hadn't uttered a word yet. Then one of the lackeys was untying me. Moments later I was stretching the kinks out of my muscles, while Mr. Wu said:

"You will untie Professor Cartwright please, Mr. Burke. Dash water in his face to bring him around."

It was while I was loosening Cartwright's bonds that Khan suddenly broke loose in a violent torrent of strange dialect.

Mr. Wu had moved back to lean against the laboratory wall, next to what looked like a gigantic fuse box. He was still smiling foolishly, but the corners of his mouth seemed drawn and extremely tired. He barked a single sharp sentence at Kahn, also in a strange dialect that wasn't Chinese, gesturing sharply with his gun.

Kahn shut up instantly.

"He told me that I was being exceedingly foolish, Mr. Burke." Wu said conversationally. "He remarked that his other henchmen would close in on me, once the alarm were given. But of course, I had adjusted the matter of the others before entering the laboratory. Not being young—as I observed to you once before, Mr. Burke—it is not my habit to be foolish."

But I was frantically splashing water over Professor Cartwright, and at last he came out of his fog, moaning slightly as the pain in him wakened also. Then, blinking, Cartwright saw the entire panorama, his jaw falling open in astonishment, the sight

seeming to drive the thought of pain from his mind.

"What does this add up to, Mr. Wu?" I demanded. "Why are you freeing us, or are you? Where is the girl?"

"I am freeing you, but not out of any emotional instability. I am freeing you because I have found that many things are necessary in this last twenty-four hour period. You and Professor Cartwright will be permitted to leave, without the machine, the dictagraph. I will remain to clean up a most untidy affair—to, as you occidentals might say it, settle a score, with Mr. Khan and his friends."

I was almost screaming my question. "But damn you, Wu, what about Joan? What about the girl? You seem to know everything, so where is she?"

MR. WU smiled that silly smile that was growing more weary with every passing minute.

"The girl is safe. She is waiting in a car, outside. Her mind will have to be restored. However, her father, with the aid of his very valuable black book. . . ." Mr. Wu paused to extract the black leather notebook from his pocket and toss it into my startled grasp, . . . "will be able to successfully restore her mind, once you have all gotten to safety."

I might have only imagined it, but I thought I saw the gun in Mr. Wu's hand waver ever so slightly. But his quiet, precise voice went on.

"Briefly Mr. Burke, the story is this. Khan's government is planning, through a union with certain European powers, to crush my own homeland. Khan is an agent for this government, and I serve my own country. It was essential to my government that Khan's seizure of the deadly dictagraph machine was not successful. I was delegated to prevent that seizure.

"Up until this point, my efforts have been inexcusably clumsy, very poorly timed. Khan almost succeeded, thanks to my dull wit. But at the moment, I hold all the . . . ah . . . aces. I intend to keep them. Khan shall not escape these grounds, neither will his henchmen."

For a second I started to say something, then Mr. Wu went on.

"Your lives are not essential to our plans, Mr. Burke, and so I am giving you time to leave. It was I who removed the girl from her room at the moment that Khan held you captive down here. As I said, she is safely awaiting you in an automobile by the side gate. One of my assistants is driving. I must have your pledge that you do not try to hold him, once he has taken you all back to the city."

"You've got it," I said quickly. "But why don't you come—"

Mr. Wu cut me off, politely.

"You do not understand the code of my race, Mr. Burke. I almost bungled my mission in stopping Mr. Khan. I have determined not to bungle again. According to code, there is but one thing I can do—escort Khan and his devils to the gates of Hell."

Sweat stood out in tiny drops on Mr. Wu's brow, and he seemed to be needing all the support he could get from the wall. His hand went up to touch the switch beside him.

"This estate," he said, "is mined with dynamite. One touch of this lever, and all is destroyed—the machine, Mr. Khan, his henchmen, and myself. Someone must remain to touch this switch. I will do so."

And as I looked at Mr. Wu's gloved hand on the switch, I saw for the first time that a thick stream of red trickled down his sleeve, and that there was another blotch of crimson just above his heart. He hadn't silenced Khan's outside forces without paying the price. He saw my glance and smiled.

"A bad cut," he explained apologetically. "I was clumsy. Now please leave. I shall give you five minutes to get to the car, and another five minutes to get safely away from the grounds. That will give me ten minutes in which I can have an interesting discussion about racial philosophies with Mr. Khan. And then—" Mr. Wu broke off with his silly smile, a smile that was suddenly very unfunny. He bowed politely, never letting his gun waver from Khan and his men for an instant.

"Please," Mr. Wu repeated courteously. "You have ten minutes."

WE left, of course, and precisely ten minutes after that, as we were speeding along the highway in a car driven by a slant-eyed young chap, the entire countryside was rocked for a radius of five miles. The explosion was tremendous, and great orange streaks shot skyward.

There was a pretty bad moment in which I had a vision of a courtly, frock-coated,

smiling little man with a crimson stain above his heart and an inquisitive gleam in his almond eyes—the imperturbable, painfully correct Mr. Wu.

And then I pushed this picture out of my mind, and looked down at the girl in my arms. Joan was sleeping as peacefully as a baby. But I knew that in less than two hours she would be restored to normal, and that those eyes would open, and I would be looking again at the mentally grown up girl I loved.

« « SCIENTIFIC ODDITIES » »

TINY BUT OH-SO-TENACIOUS!

ALTHOUGH the science and ingenuity of man has been turned to experiments in magnetics for many years, the scientists in the General Electric laboratories just recently developed what is considered to be the most powerful permanent magnet of its size in existence. This new magnet is a tiny piece of alnico, no larger than the thumbnail of an average person. Its weight is less than three quarters of an ounce, and it is capable of holding and lifting as much as two hundred pounds, which roughly amounts to around four thousand four hundred and fifty times its own weight!

ANTI-NICOTINE LEAGUE PLEASE NOTE

In spite of the numerous harmful effects that have been pointed out as the result of smoking cigars, cigarettes, pipes, or what have you, a recent laboratory test made by a bacteriologist has proved that there are some counterbalancing effects of smoking. It was proven, for example, that the consuming of one cigar (smoking, we mean, not eating), two cigarettes, or one pipeful of tobacco, results in the killing of at least one third of the live bacteria present in the mouth of the average person. This includes, of course, harmful as well as helpful bacteria. And since there is more of the former than the latter, an inveterate smoker should be able to build up a good case in his favor, providing he starts with this as a premise.

SOUNDING OFF

Common misconceptions to the contrary, the velocities of sound waves are not, and never have been, dependent on the pitch or loudness of the waves. As a matter of scientific fact, sound is only dependent on the elasticity and density of its medium for its velocity. For an example, sound waves are able to travel at the rate of only 866 feet a second through carbonic acid gas, while traveling at the rate of 1,092 feet a second through still air, 4,730 feet through water, more than 10,000 feet a second through pine wood, and almost 16,000 feet a second through iron substance.

DO ANIMALS TALK?

Many years have been spent in scientific study of possible communication ability in the animal kingdom. To date, the net result of these studies has been the gradual realization that not only do animals have means of communicating with each other, but that each group in the animal kingdom *actually has its own language!* In a test made by a scientist recently with monkeys, simian chatterings were made into recordings with the intention of playing the records back to monkeys for their reactions.

It happened that one of these recordings was made on a very stormy day. The scientists recorded the chatter of one monkey to a second —said conversation obviously being about the bad weather and rumbling thunder outside.

Then, using another monkey some days later, this "about the weather" chattering was played along with other recordings which—tho' made of monkey talk—didn't concern the weather. The lone caged monkey listened apathetically to the latter chatterings, much to the disappointment of the scientist. But when the "weather conversation" was played, the lone monkey pricked up his ears and rushed to the front of his cage, looking out and up at the sky quizzically. Then, since the weather that day was bright and cheerful, the monkey shook its head bewilderedly, and with what might have been a shrug of its shoulders retired to the back of its cage again!

AND SPEAKING OF MONKEYS

Recently a scientific argument developed over the comparative strength of chimpanzees as against the strength of collegiate athletes. (No, a disgruntled prof didn't start it as a protest against dull footballers in his classrooms). In laboratory experimentation, it was proved that a chimp weighing one hundred and thirty-five pounds, could exert a pulling force equalling one thousand, two hundred and sixty pounds. This measurement was obtained through the use of a dynamometer rope attached to a recording device. The best college athletes under identical conditions, were only able to exert a pull somewhat less than *one-half* the strength of the comparatively diminutive chimpanzee!

This chimp, it might be noted, was a lady chimp. Her mate, on another experiment, exerted a *one-handed* pull of eight hundred and forty-seven pounds! Weight lifters please move sheepishly to your corners. . . .

TAKE A DEEP BREATH!

You might not believe it, but by far the loudest respiratory movements even encountered are those of whales. Whalers who have harpooned these huge creatures of the deep have seen them remain under water for as long as two hours during the ensuing chase. And at the end of this period, when the whales were finally forced to come up for air, they have expelled their long-held breath with a "whoosh" that could be heard for more than a mile!

SECRET OF THE LOST PLANET

by DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

What great treasure was there on Planet 20 that would make a man send his best friend to death?

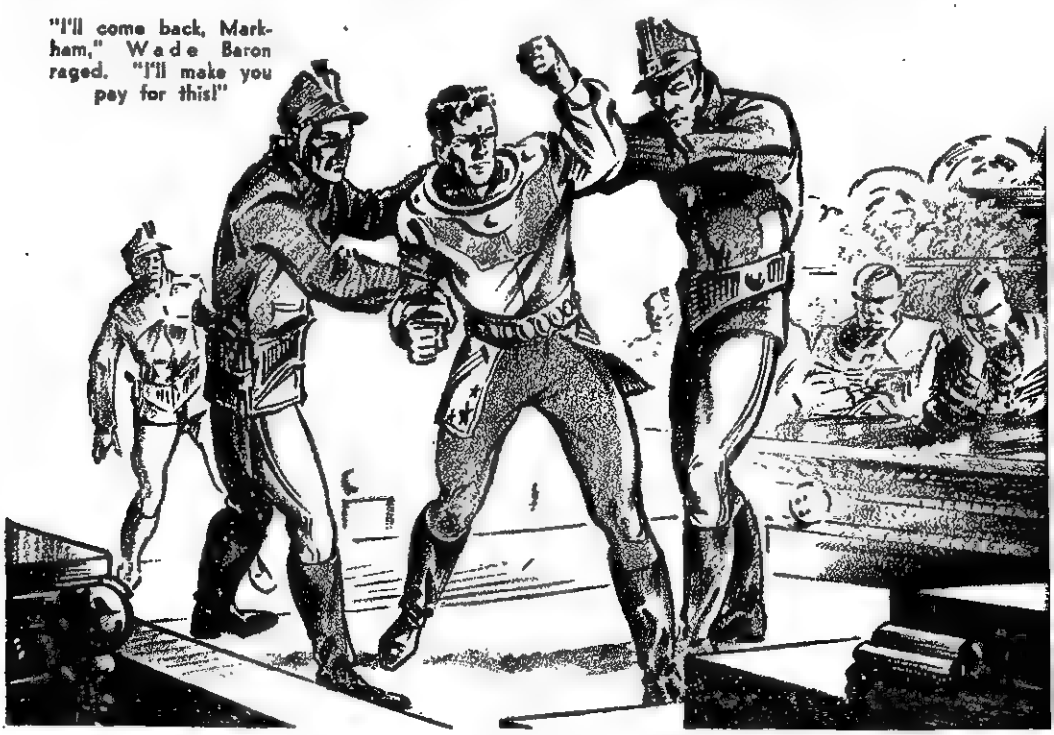
"THREE years," Wade Baron told himself happily as he stuffed the last of his space gear into the supply crates, "three long and lonely years on this God-forsaken rock in space. But I'm going back today!"

Wade whistled cheerfully and inspected his strong, clean-shaven jaw in the mirror above his bed. The three years he had lived alone on Planetoid Jaytwo, three years of solitude spent compiling charts for the Asteroid Survey Department, had enabled him to grow a beard as long as a fur coat. But now the beard was gone, for he'd shaved this morning. Shaved in honor of his start back to Earth.

He had even combed his lank black hair carefully, after doing a sketchy job of trimming it with his chart scissors. Combed his hair carefully while thinking of the girl who waited for him on Earth. The girl whom he would marry immediately upon his return, Nada Warren.

"Whoopee!" he chortled. "Damn, but it'll be fine to see Nada once more!"

Now that the three lonely years were at



"I'll come back, Markham," Wade Baron raged. "I'll make you pay for this!"

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an end, Wade was able to see that they had been worth it. Not only from the asteroid research he had been able to compile here on Jaytwo, but from the fact that his service here would be rewarded with a splendid post on Earth—at a fine salary that would enable Wade and Nada to live in luxury.

"Nada, an Earth position in the Survey Bureau, and plenty of dough on which to be happy! Wow, it's going to be great!" Wade told the silent crates.

He sat down on the edge of his bed, after the last of the gear had been packed into the crates, and tried to picture his return. Nada would be at the Space Base, of course. She'd probably been marking the days to his return just as eagerly as he had. Nada would be there, of course.

Matt Markham, good old Matt, one of his closest pals, would more than likely be waiting there for him also. Matt was a grand guy. He'd been fine about seeing to it that Nada wouldn't be lonely during Wade's absence. The sort you could trust with the girl you were going to marry, that was Matt Markham.

Wade ground out his cigarette impatiently and rose to peer into the radio-receptor which had been installed in the corner of his tiny quarters. He saw nothing but the bleak expanse of little Jaytwo. It was hard to hold back his impatience. The Space Patrol ship, which was to pick him up and take him back to Earth, should be due pretty soon.

He lighted another cigarette and grinned.

"I'll probably go crazy at the sight of that patrol ship," he told himself. "More than likely want to kiss the pilot."

Even as he inhaled deeply from his cigarette, a faint humming started from the sound vibrator in the radio-receptor. In a single bound Wade was across the room, his hands trembling slightly as he tuned in the receptor to a higher volume. The humming grew into a louder and louder snarl. Peering into the view-sights, Wade felt his heart pound excitedly against his ribs, for there, approaching Jaytwo from the northerly end, was a Space Patrol Ship!

Then and there, in the solitary silence of the little room which had been his only home for three years, Wade Baron went into a dance reminiscent of the ancient movements of the redmen who had inhabited Earth centuries before.

"Wow!" Wade repeated over and over again. "I'm acting like a fool, but I can't help it. Oh, Lord, I can't help it!" His eyes, glowing happily, were also a little moist around the crinkled corners.

LESS than fifteen minutes later, Wade was racing across the barren plain outside his cabin, rushing to greet the members of the Space Patrol Ship which had just slipped to a graceful landing on Jaytwo. His long legs ate up the distance between his tiny shack and the space ship, and even in the cumbersome clinging thickness of his space suit, he made speed.

Wade could see the percussion doors of the ship swinging open, could see the glass-helmeted heads of the crew peering forth, and he wanted to shout with joy at the sight of the lettering on the side of the craft. Huge, red, block letters that said, "Government Space Patrol." He wondered for a swift instant whether or not there would be anyone he knew in the crew. Any of his pals from the patrol service. He hoped so. But even if there weren't, just the sight of human beings was enough to send his heart leaping joyously.

He was almost able to make out the faces of the glass-helmeted patrolmen, but as yet he couldn't tell if he knew any of them. One of the crew—evidently the Flight Patrol Leader, for he was clad in a rich purple space suit—had already clambered to the rock terrain of Jaytwo. Wade could discern his features now, sharp and space-burned, like those of countless space pilots. This chap had a short pointed moustache and a deep scar across his brow.

Wade frowned. He couldn't remember any such person in the ranks of Patrol Pilots. But then, three years had passed, and the roster had undoubtedly changed a bit since the last time Wade had had contact with Earth.

The receptor mechanism on Wade's space suit hummed, an indication that the Flight Patrol Leader was speaking to him. Wade threw the reception switch wide, and the visitor's voice flooded into his helmet.

"Hello, there," said the Flight Patrol Leader, "you're Wade Baron, I imagine."

"Well," Wade grinned in answer, "I'm not Doctor Livingstone, old chap."

The Flight Patrol Leader, members of his crew following behind him, drew closer, so that Wade saw the answering grin flashing across his face.

"You sound glad to see us, Baron. My

name is Jenkins, Carse Jenkins, Flight Patrol Leader for this ship. Have you your gear and equipment packed?"

Wade was finally alongside of him, taking the Flight Leader's outstretched gauntlet in a firm grip of greeting.

"Lord, Jenkins, I've had that gear packed and ready to go for the last three years!"

There was laughter from the lean Jenkins and a like response from the members of his crew. Good bunch, Wade thought, seem like fine chaps, all of them. The six or seven crew members passed Wade on their way to his tiny quarters to get his crates. Jenkins, still grinning, said:

"They'll bring all your gear along, Baron. Come on into the ship with me, fellow, and we'll have a drink on your return."

"A swell idea," Wade answered. "The first swell idea I've heard in three years!"

CHAPTER II

Arrested For—What?

IN THE FLIGHT LEADER'S CABIN in the Space Patrol ship, Wade faced Carse Jenkins. Minus his space suit, the lean Jenkins looked slightly older than he had seemed to Wade at first sight. There was a gray tinge at his temples. But he was jovial, entertaining, Wade thought as he sipped his drink.

"And tell me," asked Wade, "how Matt Markham is getting along? Is he still with the Survey Bureau?"

Carse Jenkins looked at the glass he held in his thin strong fingers.

"No," he said after a moment. "Markham has been promoted."

Wade's enthusiasm was sincere.

"Great," he said, "that's swell to hear. Mark deserves all he gets. He's a smart chap. Always was. Knew what he wanted all along."

"Yes," Jenkins answered dryly. "Markham always knew what he wanted. But what's more important, he knew how to go about getting it."

Suddenly, and with no explanation as far as Wade could see, there was an embarrassed silence between himself and the Flight Patrol Leader. Perhaps it had been due to Jenkin's slightly peculiar response to the mention of Matt Markham. Wade couldn't tell. But he decided to get on to other subjects.

"It'll be great to get back," Wade said quickly, feeling slightly foolish at repeating a phrase he must have used at least two dozen times so far.

"You don't seem like a bad sort at all," Jenkins said quite unexpectedly. At the words, and the tone in which they were uttered, Wade looked up sharply at the moustached Flight Patrol Leader.

"What made you say that?" Wade asked bewilderedly.

Jenkins suddenly looked hard at the glass in his hands.

"You've been completely out of touch with things for three years, Baron. Changes can occur in three years, y'know."

Wade was frowning now. He didn't know what was responsible for the odd manner of Jenkins. Didn't know, but he was going to try to find out.

"I don't get it," he said sharply. "What are you driving at, Jenkins."

Jenkins looked up from his glass, Unexpectedly he smiled, once again the affable host.

"Not a thing, fellow. Forget it."

Wade could see that any chance of getting to the bottom of the scarred, moustached Flight Patrol Leader's strange attitude was closed. So he gave it up, gratefully gulping the cooling liquid of his drink. What the hell, just getting back to Earth once more, Earth and Nada, was enough to think of for the moment. Earth, and Nada.

"EARTH and Nada," Wade told himself two days later as he gazed out the front vision plates of the Space Patrol ship. In another half hour they would be at Space Base, in New York.

Just the thought of Nada, Nada, who was probably waiting down there at Space Base at this very moment, was enough to send the tingling of eagerness rushing once more through Wade Baron. He fished into his pockets and found a cigarette, lighting it with hands that trembled in excitement.

Five times already, this morning, Wade had been back and forth between the baggage compartments and the control room, checking his baggage and gear. He had dressed himself carefully, even had one of the crew trim his hair more carefully, and smoothed his garments every so often. No sense in returning to Nada looking like a space bum.

"Lord," Wade muttered to himself, "I wish this crate would get some speed on.

Here I've gone three years without a sight of Nada, and now a mere half hour looks like a century!" He grinned to himself. "It seems like the time will never pass."

But the half hour finally passed for Wade Baron. And he found himself waiting for the landing gangway to be dropped as the Space Patrol Ship nosed into berth at Space Base.

"Little old New York!" Wade marveled, as the towering city revealed itself to him on every side. Down below the ship, he could see the crowds forming beneath the spot where they would moor. His heart pounded wildly in his chest, threatening to leap to his mouth, and peering down, he tried to imagine which of the tiny dots representing people, was Nada.

It seemed like ten glacier periods later that Wade stepped out onto the landing gangway to take his first deep breath of Earth air in three years— and to search the crowd eagerly for sight of Nada. He looked, too, for some sign of big, blond Matt Markham, who would probably be there with Nada to meet him. It was going to be grand to see them!

Wade took three steps downward, then he heard his first greeting.

"Wade Baron?"

He looked up at the speaker, surprised to see that it was a huge fellow in the uniform of a government guard. Behind the towering government guard, Wade saw at least a dozen others waiting at the bottom of the ganglanding, all of them wearing the crimson tunics of guards.

"Yes," said Wade bewilderedly, eyes still scanning the crowd in an effort to find Nada and Matt. "Yes, I'm Wade Baron. What do you want?"

The towering government guard reached forth his hand. Perplexedly, Wade extended his own hand, wondering at this strange greeting. A moment later, and Wade Baron's wonder had turned to icy horror, for the officer deftly snapped steel wristbands around Wade's outstretched hand!

"You're under arrest," said the huge guard, "by order of Government!"

TURNING swiftly, the big guard beckoned to the others at the bottom of the landing. In an instant, Wade was surrounded by a crimson uniformed cordon.

"Search him!" the officer directed one of his platoon.

Before he could move, before his bewildered brain could find an answer to this ghastly mistake, hands held Wade helpless, while other hands ran through his clothing.

"Here," said one of the guards, pulling forth a sheaf of papers from the lining of Wade's tunic. "He had these hidden in there!"

Wade's eyes went wide at the sight of the papers. What they were, he had no idea. How they got there, he was equally unable to explain. Terror clutched at his heart with icy fingers, closing down until Wade felt he could scarcely breathe.

"What is this!" Wade cried wildly. "What in the hell is this all about? I demand to know!"

The large government guard had taken the papers, was scanning them swiftly.

"Our information was correct," he said grimly. "These papers are all the proof we need." He turned again to Wade. "Baron," he rasped, "the charge against you is treason against the government!"

"Treason?" Horror was closing in on Wade. "Good God! What is this all about? I've done nothing, I tell you! Nothing!"

Suddenly a red haze swept his mind, and he lashed out with his free hand, catching one of the guards in the mouth. In a split-second, bodies closed in on him, and he was buried beneath the bludgeoning blows of his captors.

In the short, unequal struggle which followed, Wade thought he saw the grim, unsmiling face of Flight Patrol Leader Carse Jenkins looking down on the scene from the cabin of the ship. Then he was being dragged down the landing gangway, still surrounded by the crimson cordon of police.

Despairingly, Wade called out wildly.

"Matt, Matt Markham! Damn you swine! Let me find Matt Markham. He'll rectify this outrage!"

The huge government guard laughed shortly, unpleasantly.

"I suppose Markham is a friend of yours?"

"You're damn right he is. He's somewhere in this crowd. Ask him about me, you fool! He'll identify me!" Wade was near hysteria, the hysteria of red, burning rage.

"You'll see *Commissioner* Markham soon enough," the guard said harshly. "You're being picked up on his orders!"

CHAPTER III

Matt Markham—True Friend

IT WAS A CONFUSED, badly beaten, and terribly bewildered Wade Baron who sat hunched dejectedly on a cell cot in Government Prison Ten, several hours later.

In his mind, Wade was desperately turning over the events of the past hours, trying to put them together, trying to link them to an answer to his ghastly nightmare. The huge guard's remark, calling Matt Markham *Commissioner,* had been the most bewildering of all. And yet it fitted in perfectly with Carse Jenkins' statement that Matt had been promoted. But Commissioner—! Why, next to the supreme post of Unifyer, the Commissioner's position was the most important on Earth!

Even so, even if Matt had risen to a position of such importance in three years, what could explain the fact that all this was the result—if the guard could be believed—of Matt's orders?

"It must be a joke, a stunt on Matt's part," Wade mumbled in confusion. But the bitter futility of the remark was evident in the cuts and bruises about his body. That was no part of a joke. And Nada—where had Nada been?

Where was Nada now ? Had she been in the crowd? Had she been waiting for him? She knew that he was to return today. If she had been in the crowd she would most certainly have seen what happened. Most certainly she would have followed him to the prison, straightened the mess out. Especially since Matt was now Commissioner. She would have gotten in touch with Matt immediately, had him take care of the ghastly error.

Error! The word flashed neon-like into Wade's mind. Error? Of course it was an error. But what about those papers, those papers which had been found on his person. Wade was certain that he had never seen them before, had no knowledge, even, of their existence. They must have been planted on him without his being aware of it.

"It *must* be a joke!" Wade insisted desperately. "Probably Matt didn't tell those stupid thug guards that it was a joke. They probably took the thing seriously. He probably didn't know they'd push me around like they did. It'll all be straightened out. Of course it will. Of course it will!"

But Wade Baron argued against himself without conviction. The facts, as they stood, pointed inevitably to one conclusion. A conclusion that he tried desperately to push to the back of his mind. He wouldn't accept it, he couldn't accept it, until he had seen Matt Markham.

WADE'S thoughts were interrupted by the sound of heavy heels ringing down the corridor leading to his cell. He sat up sharply, just in time to see a platoon of four guards, crimson tuniced, halt before the door of his cell. A fifth guard, their leader, inserted a key into the lock of the door, and it swung inward.

Standing, Wade spoke.

"What now?" There was bitterness in his voice. "Where to?"

The guard leader, a cold, impassive little man, answered unconcernedly.

"To the Planet Chambers. You're to be heard by the Commissioner and the Board."

A chill swept over Wade. Matt Markham was going to see him. What would the outcome be? Jest? Or—he still hated to face the idea—an incredible doublecross?

Then, guarded on all sides, Wade was led through the bleak gray corridors. Silent, damp, monotonous cell blocks on every side. The place sent a chill of apprehension shuddering along Wade's back. They came, at length, to a great steel door which Wade remembered passing when he was led into the prison.

There were other crimson tuniced guards outside the door, armed only with the small but very deadly light-lugers, pistols that could turn a human being to a cinder from the distance of five hundred yards. These other guards looked at Wade curiously, but without a trace of compassion on their faces.

The guard leader who had taken Wade from his cell spoke to the men before the great steel door.

"Tell them," he said, "that we have the prisoner awaiting their pleasure."

Moments later, after disappearing through the door, the guard who had entered the chamber reappeared.

"You are to enter," he announced. "The Commissioner is waiting."

Noiselessly, the huge steel door swung open. Surrounded once again by the cordon of guards, Wade was led inside,

into one of the most enormous and richly colored rooms he had ever beheld. Vast and high ceilinged, the place was a cross between a mighty cathedral and an inordinately large court room.

Towering pillars of marble reached to the ceiling, and the rich red rugs beneath Wade's feet were as soft as thick velvet. Drapes of golden mesh formed a covering to the coldness of the marble walls. At the far end of the room was a huge dias, constructed of black oak and draped in red.

It was in the center of this dias, surrounded on either side by lower dignitaries, that Matt Markham, *Commissioner* Matt Markham, sat watching the approach of the prisoner.

TO Wade, who had never had occasion to enter the Justice Chambers before, the place was bewildering, awe-inspring, in its utter splendor. Seeing Markham, Wade tried to catch his eye, but his friend was gazing abstractedly at a sheaf of papers, and it wasn't until Wade was led directly before him, at the center of the dias, that he looked up.

"Matt!" Wade blurted. "Matt, I'm glad to see you, fellow. Get this mess straightened out immediately, won't you? A joke is a joke, and all that, but these chaps don't seem to know it!" He was grinning embarrassedly at Markham, but the glance that his friend returned was cold, thoughtful.

"Wade Baron?" Matt Markham asked icily, his bushy blond eyebrows knitting in a frown.

Wade gulped. He looked wildly from one to the other of the lesser officials seated around Markham, hoping to find some sign of levity in their eyes. This *had* to be a joke. It *had* to!

Wade's eyes flashed back to Markham, swiftly appraising his friend, noting the slight changes that three years had brought about in him. He was heavier, Markham was, and his face was lined with a sternness which Wade had never seen before. His blond hair was closely cropped, and his wide mouth was set in a rigid uncompromising line. His eyes, as they bored down on Wade, were gray and flinty in their hardness. Something inside of Wade, something akin to instinct, told him that there was no levity here. Markham was playing no joke. There would be no mercy, no friendship.

"Wade Baron?" Markham repeated again, impatiently.

Red creeped up from Wade's collar, sweeping hotly to his lean features, to the crown of his lank black hair. His hands were moist and shaking as rage took possession of him.

"Markham," he said as evenly as he could. "I don't know what in the hell this is all about. You'd know that. But something pretty rancid is going on here. I've done nothing. If this is your idea of humor—"

"You are charged with treason," Markham broke in coldly, and Wade sensed a hidden mockery behind those flinty eyes. "Treason against Government is a crime punishable by death. We," he waved his hand slightly to indicate the other dignitaries, "have debated on your case for the past three hours. The papers found in your possession were enough to damn you. Definite evidences of your alliance with the enemies of Government have been proven. What have you to say in your defense?"

"Defense?" Wade exploded. "Defense? Defense against what? Defense against something about which I know nothing? I've never seen those papers you speak of, except for that moment at the Space Base when they were supposed to have been found in my pockets. I haven't even the slightest idea of what they contain. If they indicate treason, I can't even tell you how, or in what fashion they do so. This thing is a ghastly fraud, a horrible frame-up, Markham. I don't know what it's all about. But I know my rights. I demand public trial, Open Chamber hearing on this thing!"

Markham shook his head slowly, and his voice softened as he spoke.

"We were friends at one time, Wade Baron. Everyone in this Chamber knows as much. But my duty has always been my sacred bond. I cannot go back on it. There have been many changes in the past three years—three years during which you were under constant observation on Jaytwo. You thought you were alone, isolated on a deserted little planet. You thought that your dealings with the enemies of Government could be carried on in perfect secrecy from such an isolated base. But that is where you made your error. Your movements were constantly watched by us. Intelligence had you under constant surveillance."

Wade's interrupting laugh was bitter. "Watched, watched was I? Watched while I charted my asteroid surveys? Watched while I worked night and day in the service of Government?"

Markham shook his head.

"The evidence has been compiled and presented to the court. The most damning piece we have against you is contained in the documents found on your person when you returned to Earth. We have reached our verdict, Wade Baron."

THE rage had drained from Wade, leaving his throat dry and choked, his eyes blurred with tears of futility and bewilderment. Was the cold official sitting upon the huge dias Matt Markham? Matt Markham the friend he had eagerly waited to see? Matt Markham, who had taken care of Nada for him during those three years? What had happened? And Nada, where was she at this moment?

"As I said," Markham continued, "the punishment for treason is death."

A chill swept Wade's spine at the words. He tried to open his mouth, tried to find words to protest. But the very coldness around him told him that resistance would be futile, laughably futile. He was framed, solidly, definitely, and there wasn't a thing in the world he could do about it. He ran his hand across his face, trying to wipe away the nightmare surrounding him.

"However," Markham went on, "we have decided that, inasmuch as your previous service to Goverment has been more than exemplary, we will commute your sentence to life imprisonment. Life imprisonment in the government penal institution on the planet Cardo!"

Wade raised his eyes hopelessly to Markham. Cardo! Death, he knew, would have been far better than Cardo. Markham knew it, too, Wade was certain. A frame-up, not a chance to demand trial, resulting in the living hell of Cardo penal institution!

Softly, as if from a great distance, Wade heard his own voice speaking.

"Markham," he was saying, "Markham, I don't know the why or wherefor of this. But I do know one thing, I'll get you, Markham. I'll get you if it's the last thing in the universe I ever do!"

There was a caustic relish in Matt Markham's voice as he replied.

"And, of course, as far as the world is concerned, Wade Baron, you are dead. Your relatives and ah, er, friends . . ." Wade knew he meant Nada Warren, ". . . will be informed of your death. It will save them the knowledge of the shame and disgrace you have brought upon them."

The world at that moment, collapsed utterly around Wade Baron. Numbly, helplessly, he stood there, gazing dry-eyed at the man who had conspired this ruin for him. The man who would, in another hour, inform Nada Warren that her fiancée, Wade Baron, was dead!

To all appearances, as Wade stood there powerless against the forces that had crushed him, he was beaten, impotent, drained of all emotion. But deep inside his chest a spark had ignited a glowing coal. A fiercely burning resolve that was deeper than hate, stronger than any anger.

"Markham," Wade repeated dully, "you'll pay for this. Pay for it with every last bit of searing agony I can bring your soul!"

"The prisoner is committed to Cardo for the remainder of his natural life!" Commissioner Markham declared, and a gavel fell heavily on the thick oak of the dias.

CHAPTER IV

Cardo, World of Living Hell

FROM the porthole of the prison spaceship, Wade Baron, shackled hand and leg to twenty other prisoners, watched the planet Cardo grow in the distance. The past twenty-four hours had been burning torment to his soul. Hustled back to the cell from which he'd been taken, Wade was given a change of tunic to the gray prison garb, then speedily and secretly taken to Space Base where the prison spaceship was waiting to carry its cargo of condemned humanity to the penal planet.

When the guards had fixed the shackles on him, Wade had had to force himself to hold back the rage that swept him. It would have been futile to struggle. He knew that much. Others among the twenty-one convicts had tried it and were even now whimpering over the ghastly burns inflicted on them by the merciless guards. Burns that would remain open sores for many months to come.

Wade forced himself to endure the indignities heaped on him by the Guards, and spent his time in observation of his fellow convicts He noted, with growing surprise,

that there were only four of them, at the most, who looked or acted like men of criminal nature. The rest, like himself, were clear-eyed, upstanding, with an air of decency about them. They looked like professional, medical, or business men.

Wade was puzzled. What had been the crimes of these men? Had they, like himself, been railroaded, framed? But Cardo —at least as recently as three years previously—had not been a political prison. It had been a quarantine planet for the scum and riff-raff of the criminal world.

As for the names of the other prisoners, there was no way in which Wade could ascertain who they were, or had been. The huge block numbers on the front of the prison gray tunics were all there was to identify them. Wade's was 397. The white-headed old man beside him was 408. He was of special interest to Wade. There was an air of aristocracy, dignity, about him that commanded respect. He was short, with an inquisitive way of holding his head, and had a white moustache and goatee.

As soon as he could do so without the knowledge of the guards, Wade spoke to him. The old man was gazing forth at the approaching penal planet, his expression inscrutable, through a porthole near Wade.

"That's going to be some home, eh?" Wade remarked dryly.

The old man turned wordlessly, looking at Wade as though in appraisal. At length he spoke.

"Yes," he said, "a lovely home, indeed. Constructed to shield the universe from swine, it is now going to conceal the universe from you and me."

"My name . . ." Wade began. The old man interrupted, holding up his hand.

"What difference does a name mean to either of us now?" he observed dryly. "We are numbered, like cattle. But if you must stand on formality, my young friend, my name is Hannes Jardon."

Wade about to reply with his own identification, stopped short and gasped.

"Jardon?" Then, reddening, he blurted, "Not *Professor* Jardon?"

The old man smiled, nodded.

"Yes, Professor Jardon." Then, before Wade could speak again, 'What is your name?"

Wade told him hurriedly, then went on to express his utter astonishment at the professor's identity.

"But *you*, Professor, one of the greatest minds in modern science, what, how, that is, why are you here? Why are you a prisoner shackled aboard this ship?"

The old man shrugged.

"Does it make any difference now? You might ask Commoissioner Markham. I believe he mentioned something about treason."

Wade was about to voice his amazement when a guard approached.

"Break it up," the crimson tuniced captor snarled. Wade moved clumsily away, hampered by his shackles, and the old man did likewise nodding his head to indicate that they would talk later.

IT was much later before Wade saw old Professor Jardon again. Three months later to be exact. Three months spent in the damp dungeons of Cardo. Three months living in comparative solitude broken only by the twice daily sloppy rations pushed into his stinking little cell by a guard.

The prison on Cardo was an immense affair. Countless winding corridors, endless lines of stinking dungeons. Dungeons in which a man had only to extend his hands to either side to touch both walls at once. Dungeons the blackness of which was never broken, save on the twice daily ration visits of the guards. Men were not meant to serve out their sentences on Cardo. It hadn't been designed for that. It was a place where men vanished. No one returned from there—alive.

All this Wade Baron had heard. And all this he now knew to be true. There were cells adjoining his, cells above him, cells beneath him. And from these, through the long endless hours, Wade could hear the ceaseless sobbing of his fellow unfortunates.

The sobbing invariably followed the visits of the guards, and the sickening sound of their heavy blows on defenseless flesh. Wade wondered more than once why he was left unmolested. But solitude, to Wade Baron, was not enough to break him. He had lived alone for three years. On Jaytwo there had been no voices save his own, no thoughts save those he conjured. Even hell can be bearable if a man can listen to his own thoughts.

And Wade Baron had learned to do just that. For he had much to think about. After his first several days of solitude in his cell on Cardo, Wade had managed to push remorse to the back of his mind, knowing

that it is remorse and remorse alone that licks a man. Wade wasn't licked. Didn't intend to be licked. For there was his score, his score with Matt Markham and the others who had done this to him.

Revenge, carefully planned, diabolically matured, was the one factor that kept Wade Baron living on. And bit by bit, Wade was arriving at a scheme, a possible way to freedom and the fullfillment of that revenge.

A scheme that grew still more plausible after those first three months had passed, that took definite shape on his meeting with Professor Jardon.

For some unaccountable reasons of generosity, Wade and ten of the prisoners who had arrived on Cardo with him, were permitted a brief glimpse of light, a brief breath of air, in the exercise yards of the prison.

Jardon was among those ten. And, seeing him for the first time in three months, Wade paled, clenching his fists and biting his lip to hold back the exclamation of horror he felt rising to voice. The professor, wretchedly pale, terribly emaciated, was barely able to struggle along in the line of shuffling prisoners.

Twice he fell, and twice the brutal kicks of the guards brought him staggering once more to his feet. The men were unfettered, but shackles would have been unnecessary, such was their physical condition. Even Wade found walking difficult after the cramped confinement that had been his for the past three months. Looking at the ghastly pallor of his fellow prisoners, Wade realized that he, too, must look much the same.

"MOVE on there!" The command barked by one of the crimson-clad guards jerked Wade's attention from his fellow sufferers. He looked at the burly guard who had barked the order, and thought mentally of what he would give to have a light-luger in his hand for only a moment.

Then Professor Jardon fell for the third time.

"Get him up! Make that damned old goat stay erect!" Two of the guards crossed the exercise yard to where Jardon lay inertly on the ground. There was a series of sickening blows as their heavy boots thudded mercilessly into the old man's ribs.

Wade Baron could stand it no longer. Some how he was running, staggering, across the exercise yard to where the Professor lay.

"Blast your stinking hides!" he shouted. "Stand away from that poor devil!"

Wildly his hands tore at the guard closest to the inert old man, spun the fellow around. The blow which Wade smashed into the surprised fellow's face was feeble, but the unexpectedness of it caught the guard off balance, and he sprawled backwards.

In another instant, as Wade was dropping to his knees beside Professor Jardon's beaten body, three guards hurled themselves on his back, flattening him to the ground beside the old man. Wade didn't have time to shield himself from the blows that rained on him a moment later, didn't have time to roll out of range of those punishing kicks. The merciful curtain of unconsciousness slipped over him as his tortured body could bear the pain no longer.

"Throw them in the same cell together," one of the crimson tuniced guards snapped, "and get those others back to their cells. We'll take care of them later!"

CHAPTER V

Professor Jardon's Secret

WADE BARON rose dazedly to one elbow, blinking back the pain that seared his aching head, and trying to focus his eyes in the stygian darkness that enveloped him. The damp musky smell that assailed his nostrils told him instantly that he was once again in one of the dungeons, possibly his own.

The sharp pain subsided to a dull throbbing above his eyes. Wade was able to see faintly through the aid of a murky beam filtering into the cell from a narrow window close to the ceiling.

With the chill of the slimy cobble-stoned floor forcing him to shiver involuntarily, Wade managed to rise painfully to his feet. For a moment he stood there, swaying slightly, fighting to keep from toppling forward again. Then, the nausea in his stomach settling somewhat, Wade looked about.

Someone else was in the cell with him. Someone lying in a queerly twisted heap less than a yard from his feet. And as recollection came to him, Wade recognized Professor Jardon. Cursing softly between swollen lips, he stepped swiftly forward and bent over the old man. In a moment he was cradling the scientist's bloody head in his lap, shaking him gently, trying to bring the old man back to consciousness.

"Professor," Wade whispered, "Professor, come around old fellow. They've gone!"

His only answer was a tremulous sigh, a soft moan.

Suddenly Wade gasped. His arms, in which the old man's head rested, were warm and moist. He didn't have to see the color of the substance to know it was blood that slowly oozed from a deep wound in the side of Professor Jardon's head. And as he tenderly touched his hand to the wound, Wade shuddered. The old fellow's skull had been crushed, just beneath the ear, by one of those brutal kicks!

Jardon's eyes flickered faintly. Then they opened, and he looked weakly, blankly, up at Wade.

"They, they shan't have them," he murmured.

Tears rolled down Wade Baron's cheeks, and he answered the old man softly.

"It's all right, Professor, no one will harm you."

The scientist opened his mouth to form words again, then his eyes lighted slightly in recognition.

"Oh, it is you, my young friend. You—you—" he was speaking with much difficulty, "shouldn't have endangered yourself for me."

Wild rage was flooding Wade Baron's mind. Rage at the beasts who had done this. Rage at the beast who had been responsible for this living hell. He bit his lip, choking back his emotion.

"Young man," the Professor was murmuring, "listen to me, young man." He coughed hackingly, red saliva running from the corners of his mouth. "Listen to me," he repeated, his voice growing faint for a moment. "I'm dying, I fear."

Wade said nothing, merely biting deeper into his underlip until the blood ran salty in his mouth. Tears blurred his vision until he was barely able to see the face of the kindly old man.

"Someone must know," the scientist was saying. "I must pass my knowledge on to someone. Planet Twenty, they want Planet Twenty." His voice faltered once more, and he fought for breath, his frail chest heaving spasmodically.

Wade still held his tongue. There was nothing he could say, nothing he could do to help. The old man was dying. Wade suspected that he was delirious. He tried to ease the scientist's head gently to a more comfortable position.

"YOUNG MAN," the scientist resumed in a voice a little more even, "you probably think me raving, delirious. Hear me, please. I am quite in possesion of my faculties. There is not much time, hear me."

Voice choked, Wade managed to answer him.

"Go ahead, Professor. I'm listening. Go ahead with what you have to tell me."

"They want Twenty, Planet Twenty. Markham wanted it. I wouldn't reveal its location. That's why I'm here." He broke off once more, his breath coming fainter. "Bend closer, young man," he faltered, "I've not long. Minutes precious."

Wade bent his head to the old man's lips, brushing back the tears from his face as he did so.

"You will find the papers, papers giving the location of Twenty, in my tunic. Take them from my body. There is knowledge there, young man, and wealth and power which I would never allow to fall into the hands of Markham. My secret laboratories, no one else knows their location, others are dead long since." The old fellow's breath was beginning to rattle in his throat.

"Yes," Wade answered, "I'll take them, Professor."

"Use them, boy. You look clean, decent. Don't let them fall into other hands. Markham, Markham wants that knowledge to destroy the Unifyer, take control of Government." The old man's voice was barely audible now. "I pass the information on to you, use it boy. Destroy Markham. But if you fail, destroy the papers. Destroy them bef—"

Professor Jardon ended the sentence abruptly. As abruptly as Death took him from the arms of Wade Baron. Gently, Wade lowered the old man to the damp cobblestones of the dungeon floor.

"Another item, Markham," Wade muttered softly, "another item for which you'll roast!"

Respectfully, then, Wade removed the shirt of his tunic. For an instant he hesitated as he held it above the old scientist. He bit his lip in indecision. The scientist might not have been raving. Gently, then, he placed his hands inside the tunic of Professor Jardon. Placed his hand beneath the tunic and stopped sharply at what it encountered, a sheaf of papers!

He withdrew the papers, placing them at his side, then gently placed his tunic shirt

over the scientist's face. He remained kneeling there for a moment in silent tribute to the old man. Then, picking up the papers, Wade rose and walked over to where the murky beam of light filtered faintly in from the window near the ceiling.

There Wade, straining his eyes in the gloom, scrutinized the papers left by Professor Jardon. There were seven or eight electratyped sheets, and one large parchment-like paper folded several times to the size of the others. Wade unfolded the parchment first.

It was a planetoid chart, a cosmic map. His eyes narrowed, then he gasped involuntarily. The charted planet sector was that in which his former habitat, Jaytwo was located!

Running his thumb rapidly across the map, Wade located Jaytwo, located, also, the other planets in its vicinity which he had spent three years in charting. Then his thumb stopped at the far corner of the map. There was a planet charted there—a planet which, as far as Wade had previously known, was nonexistent!

Beneath the marking of this planet was scrawled, "Twenty."

Wade frowned. This, evidently, was the Planet Twenty which the old man had mentioned again and again in his last moments. But there couldn't be any such planet. He himself had charted that interspacial area for three years, charted it minutely and in infinite detail. It was impossible. But Jardon had mentioned a Planet Twenty, and this map showed it.

FOLDING the map, Wade stuffed it beneath his arm and turned his attention to the electratyped sheets. The first of them, bearing Professor Jardon's signature, was titled, "Concerning Twenty."

Brows knitted, eyes straining in the faint illumination coming from the tiny window, Wade read the page. Then he reread it, excitedly. When he finally had done with it, he had scanned it a total of eight times.

The next sheet was titled, "Record of Twenty and its equipment. Details leading to Markham's discovery of its existence." This information, Wade saw at a glance, was contained in the remaining seven pages.

He slumped down to the floor, leaning his back against the damp wall, and gave himself over to the perusal of Jardon's manuscript.

It was a half hour later before Wade put aside the papers and rose once more. There was a burning restlessness in his movements as he paced rapidly back and forth in the narrow confines of the tiny cell. His mind was wrestling excitedly with the information set down in Professor Jardon's manuscript. Excitedly and incredulously, for the statements that were set carefully down in electratype were the most astonishing revelations Wade had ever encountered.

"If I could be certain," Wade muttered, "that the old man was quite sane when he compiled that information. If I could be sure—" The implications left in his mind by those seven pages were staggering to the imagination.

Twenty, a planet previously unheard of, a planet containing untold treasure in scientific knowledge, containing incredible power. The story of that planet, Jardon's secret, of the old scientist's laboratories hidden there from the universe, all this had been contained on those electratyped pages, the parchment map.

Wade looked at the silent figure lying on the floor, at the old man who had created this fabulous secret scientific hoard, created it and kept the secret sealed until now.

In the pages, too was information which filled the gaps of Wade's knowledge of what had happened in the universe during his three years isolation on Jaytwo. Tersely, the old scientist had told of Matt Markham's rise to power in Goverment. Had told, too, of the Professor's realization that Markham had to be thwarted before it became too late.

Planet Twenty—that had been Jardon's solution to the rising menace of Matt Markham. With the aid of a few trusted fellow scientists, Professor Jardon had constructed his secret laboratories on the uncharted, unknown planet. Matt Markham, the pages stated, had suspected the plan of Jardon, had gotten some inkling of it. Jardon's aids had been mercilessly tortured to death in Markham's attempts to wring the secret from them. But they had died rather than turn the tremendous power of Twenty into the power-mad young politician's hands.

Until there was only Professor Jardon left with the knowledge of the secret.

Wade could see it all clearly now, and what he didn't know was supplied by the information contained in the documents the old man had passed on to him. The old

scientist had been sent to Cardo to break him, to reduce him to a state wherein he would willing turn over his information to Markham. But the job had been done too well. And now Jardon was dead.

And the terse electratyped pages supplied more information. They stated that Markham knew, had somehow found out, that the secret planet of Professor Jardon was somewhere within the cosmic area of Jay-two. He had discovered that much, but had still been unable to get the exact location of the place.

Which, Wade realized, was where he entered into the scheme of his former friend. Markham, knowing that Wade had spent three years in exhaustive research of that interplanetary range, and knowing that Wade was returning with extensive information about that cosmic range, figured that the surveys might lead him to Professor Jardon's secret Planet Twenty.

"I can see," Wade whispered bitterly to himself, "why Markham wanted me out of the way, why he wanted my asteroid survey reports." Even as he spoke, he knew also that Markman had another reason for wanting him out of the way. That reason was Nada Warren.

Markham's lust, Markman's greed for power, had been his reasons for framing Wade Baron. Even though Wade had once been his closest friend. The picture of that scene in the Justice Chambers flashed back to Wade Baron, then. He saw himself facing Markham. He heard his own voice saying huskily, "I'll get you Markham."

There in the darkness and stench of the tiny cell, standing above the body of the brutally murdered Jardon, Wade Baron reasserted his vow.

"It's still a bet," he told the silence. "I'm going to get you, Markham. I'll get you if it's the last thing I do!"

CHAPTER VI

A Break for Liberty

FOR THREE HOURS Wade kept silent vigil beside the body of Professor Jardon, and during those hours his mind explored the possibilities of escape.

The murky half-light which seeped into the cell from the high barred window near the ceiling had almost vanished, making the gloom of the tiny cell deeper. Frantically, Wade searched for some idea, some method by which he could escape.

The guards, he knew, were due to arrive at any moment. It was imperative, consequently, that he prepare himself to strike for freedom then. His opportunity would never be better. They would be thrown into confusion when they found Jardon dead. It might give Wade a chance to make his break.

For the knowledge from those documents would never be of aid unless he could gain freedom. He had stuffed the papers deep into the side of his space boots, which he still wore.

Once he was free, once he had gained Planet Twenty—Wade had plans after that.

Wade panthered furiously back and forth in the narrow confines of the tiny cell, accepting ideas only to reject them again as implausible, unworkable. Time was an essential. At any moment he might hear the tramp of guards marching down the silent cell corridors.

His lean features twisted in desperate concentration, Wade ran his hand through his lank black hair, across the short beard which three months had grown, and looked up toward the ceiling.

The tiny aperture, barred and high from the floor, which served as the only window, provided no chance for escape. It was much to narrow to permit Wade to wriggle through, even to slide half a shoulder into. He discarded the thought. Discarded the thought, and then returned to it.

Brow wrinkled in contemplation, Wade studied the window. He looked, then, at the still body of Professor Jardon. Restlessly his eyes scanned the barred opening once again.

"It might," he muttered softly. "It might work."

Rapidly, then, he tore long strips from the tunic shirt which he had placed over Jardon's face. Working swiftly, lest the guards approach before he was ready, Wade twisted the strips into a long cord. He jerked it several times to test its strength, was satisfied that it would hold. Long enough anyway.

Then, improvised rope in his hands, Wade sat down on the damp cobble-stoned floor of his cell to wait for the sounds of approaching guards. Silently, desperately, he was praying that it would work.

Later, perhaps a half hour, perhaps an hour, the faint sound of heels clacking

down the corridor outside the cell came to Wade's ears. He leaped to his feet, straining his ears. He had to make certain. Couldn't take a chance.

"The guards," he grunted in satisfaction a moment later. Then, swiftly, Wade Baron went to work. A lot hinged on the reaction of the guards when they'd find Jardon dead by the door.

His makeshift rope was through the bars of the tiny window. Through the bars while Wade, finding foothold in the irregular surface of the damp wall, clambered toward the opening until he could hang from it by one hand.

The sounds of the approaching footsteps were growing much louder, and sweat broke out on Wade's forehead as he worked desperately with his free hand—fastening a noose.

It was ready, and Wade managed to swing his head through it, after tying the other end of the improvised rope to one of the bars. He still clung, with his remaining strength, to the bar by means of his free hand. A lot was going to depend on timing. He couldn't wait too long, couldn't be too hasty, in letting himself drop into the strangling bonds of the noose.

For Wade Baron intended to hang himself.

THE sound of the footsteps was less than twenty feet from the cell door now. Twenty feet, coming closer. Wade prayed that the guards would cut him down in time. The strangulation would black-out consciousness—it would be better than feigning it—and seem similar to death. But it couldn't kill him, if the guards acted in time. Wade had to chance that.

The death of the scientist, and the consternation of the guards at it, would make Wade's pseudo-suicide seem real enough when they saw him dangling from the bars.

Keys were clicking around the lock of the cell door. Voices muffled by the intervening door, were grumbling. Wade released his grip on the bars. Released his grip and felt the strangling cord cutting in on his throat, cutting off his breath.

Spots were dancing before his eyes, and he could feel the veins bulging out on his forehead. The keys were still clicking tantalizingly in the door. Through the wave of horrible darkness that was pressing in on him, Wade had time to pray that they would enter the cell in time, would cut him down before his trick turned into horrible reality.

The spots were bigger and blacker, flashing sparks mingling with them. Voices swam dizzily in Wade's brain. As if in a nightmare, he could feel his hands reaching up to his neck, clawingly, desperately. Then Wade Baron knew no more.

The noose had closed out consciousness. . . .

"Throw 'em in the corner. Dead ones. Stiff cremation tomorrow morning." The voices buzzed fuzzily in Wade Baron's mind, and he felt hands lifting his apparently lifeless body high, a few steps, then a sickening drop as he struck stone pavement.

Some instinct enabled Wade to keep from moving, keep from crying out, although his mind was still hazy, still dazed. He lay there, scarcely breathing, hearing the voices, hearing footsteps sounding by his body.

"Going to catch hell," he heard the voices clearer now. "The old man wasn't supposed to have been liquidated, just pushed around a bit. Doesn't make any difference about the other, though. Just as good dead." Recollection of what had happened was returning to Wade. "I'd hate to have been the one who kicked the old man's skull in."

It had worked. The air on his cheek told Wade that he was in some sort of a clearing. He'd been cut down in time, taken for dead, and dragged outside with old Professor Jardon's body!

He held his breath, certain that the excited hammering of his heart could be heard by anyone within a yard of him.

The voices were moving away.

"Pick 'em up in the morning. There are other stiffs to bring up. Six more passed off in their cells today. Cremation for the bunch tomorrow."

Eyes shut fast, Wade waited until the last echo of the foot-steps died away on the pavement. He didn't move then, however, for he couldn't be certain that all had gone. He wondered if it were dark enough to risk opening his eyes, then remembered that twilight was descending into the gloomy cell when the guards were approaching. It must be dark, he reasoned, for his eyes would have sensed any light, even though shut.

Nevertheless, Wade waited for what seemed to be an endless century until he

was certain that there were no more sounds. Then he opened his eyes a hair-breadth of an inch. Darkness surrounded him.

Moving his head slowly to one side, accustoming his eyes to the darkness as he did so, Wade could see that he was in a large court, open to the sky. A large pavemented court in which at least fifteen or twenty bodies lay lifelessly together. Lifelessly with the exception of one—Wade.

Still Wade acted with infinite caution, moving laboriously, slowly, inch by inch, until he was in a better position to view the court. It was deserted save for the corpses.

CAUTIOUSLY, Wade rose to his feet. Looking at the bodies lying around him, he was forced to shudder. Some of them had obviously been here at least a week. Evidently the cremation spoken of by the guard took place at spaced intervals, possibly every two weeks.

The freshness of the air did not entirely drive off the stench of dead flesh. Wade's jaw shut grimly. So far so good. But this was a momentary sort of freedom. He couldn't stay here.

He was free of the cell. But now he had to find some manner of escaping Cardo itself. Slipping into the even inkier blackness along a wall beside him, Wade proceeded cautiously toward a gate which was visible at the far end of the court.

Now and again he would pause, listening, craning his neck to peer through the darkness ahead. Then, assured that the way was safe, he would move forward several yards more. In this fashion he finally reached the gate to the courtyard.

There was no one at the gate. Dead men need no guards. With a soft sigh of relief, Wade slipped through the portal. He forced back an exclamation of joyous surprise, as his eyes swept the terrain ahead of him.

Off in the distance was the towering black bulk of Cardo prison—which meant that the guards had taken him outside of its confinement completely! Evidently the convicts who died inside its walls were removed to this court where they were left until cremation.

Wade judged the prison to be more than a mile away, and lying on the far side of it, he knew, was the landing base for the prison space ships.

The government guards and wardens who served on Cardo Planet were quartered less than a quarter of a mile from the space landing platforms, Wade recalled, remembering a descriptive map of the planet which he had studied in connection with a survey some years before.

Between Wade and the space platforms lay the prison, with guards stationed in watchtowers, and the Resident Service quarters. If he could slip past these—His jaw hardened. He *had* to!

Wade Baron started toward the prison, across the open terrain. Suddenly he stopped short. The chance of his being seen by a Guard was too great. He dropped to the ground instantly on this realization. His fingers, as he pushed himself slowly across the barren stretch, kept slipping in the peculiar clay substance from which Cardo was formed. He paused, breathing heavily, the confinement of months in the cramped cell telling heavily on his strength.

He wondered if his gray tunic could be discerned from the watchtowers, and as he wondered was seized with an idea. Five minutes later, Wade had smeared himself from head to foot with the black slime clay—perfect camouflage.

Inching once more along the open terrain, Wade stopped suddenly, his veins turning to ice.

"Watch!" The word came from somewhere behind him, accompanied by the *sluck sluck* sound of boots moving toward the place where he lay. His heart began a furious tattoo of terror in his chest, and he buried his face deep in the slime clay.

"All well, Watch!" another voice answered through the darkness. But the boots moved closer, closer. Wade thought he could hear other steps retreating, fading away.

There was an almost imperceptible knoll to Wade's left, and he prayed that it might conceal him from the approaching sentry. From the sound of the sentry's steps, Wade judged him to be less than ten yards away by now.

Five yards. Wade held his breath.

There was a startled gasp, and simultaneously Wade knew that he had been observed and the guard was investigating. He cursed inwardly, body tensing, as the steps slucked directly toward him. He knew that he would never be hidden, once the sentry drew within a few feet of him. So he did the only thing left to him under the circumstances. He waited until he heard the

tread of the boots almost directly beside him.

Then Wade Baron rose from the slime, black, terrifying, gaunt. Rose from the slime and launched himself in a swift dive at the guard who stood frozen in open-mouthed horror less than three feet away!

CHAPTER VII

A Way to Escape?

TO WADE'S ADVANTAGE were the surprise and confusion of the guard. Whatever he had expected to find, when his attention was drawn to the object in the black slime, he certainly wasn't prepared for an incredibly wild attack by an escaped convict.

A hoarse cry catching in his throat, the guard went down beneath the weight of Wade's body. Wade's fingers had found the jugular vein, worked along the neck to the wind-pipe, and he squeezed without compassion, without mercy—savagely.

The cry choked off into a weak gurgle, and minutes later, Wade felt the helpless struggling of the fellow cease, felt the body go limp beneath him.

Wade's hand flashed to the side of the guard's body, found the holster and pulled forth a light-lugger. He rolled off the inert, unresisting form of his victim, lying silent on his stomach for an instant, looking wildly about to see if the struggle had been noticed.

It hadn't.

Light-luger clutched in his hand, Wade started to inch ahead once more. Started, then stopped. Quickly, he inched back to the body of the guard, an idea born. Stripping off his tunic trousers, Wade used the inside of the garment to partially scrape the slime from his body. Then he went swiftly to work on the guard.

Five minutes later, still slightly dirtied by the remnants of the black slime, Wade Baron rose. He was clad in the crimson tunic of a Government guard. In the darkness, from a distance, he looked like any patrolling sentry.

Wade walked rapidly, now, and with confidence. From the watchtower he would never be taken for anything but a sentry. That was all he needed, to get past the prison. Past the prison and onto the space landing platforms.

He passed beneath the first watchtower some three minutes later. Passed beneath unchallenged. The same held true of the other three watchtowers. Five more minutes, and Cardo Prison was behind him.

Down a gently sloping hill lay the Resident Service quarters, a series of alumno-chrome structures as modern as the prison was medieval. From the glowing fluero-domes on the tops of the buildings, Wade knew that many of the guards and wardens were resting for the night.

He hoped, with a brief fervor, that they were resting soundly. For going through that small village was going to be his most difficult task by far. The streets, through which he would be forced to pass, were all illuminated. Not brilliantly, but enough to give him away should he be seen by any restless guards.

Wade steeled himself. The streets were deserted, but he couldn't be certain that they were going to remain that way. His hand slipped to his side, and he patted his holstered light-luger for reassurance.

"This should help," he muttered, "if anything goes wrong!"

On the other side of the little village were the space landing platforms. In gaining those platforms lay his only chance of gaining freedom. Wade stepped into the first of the streets, walking swiftly, but not at a pace that would cause undue suspicion. He was conscious of the appearance he presented under light.

Clay slime still matted his beard and hands and face, and although he was clad in the Guard crimson, he knew that one look at his face would betray him.

WADE made the first block unmolested, unnoticed, and breathed a short sigh of relief. There were two blocks left to cover. Two blocks left to the landing platforms. Already Wade could make out the platforms in the distance. Huge space hangars, squatting frog-like along the edges of the platform, seemed empty-jawed in the darkness.

On the landing runways were at least a dozen space craft, set in mooring for immediate take-off. Wade could see this by the outlines of shadow on the platforms, even though the platforms themselves were cloaked in darkness.

He was in the middle of the second block when it happened.

The sound of a door swinging open made him turn. Turn to face a man emerging

from a building less than five feet off the street beacon he was passing. The fellow, Wade saw instantly from his flashing tunic, was a sentry, a guard!

The fellow, a burly man with massive shoulders, had just strapped on his holster when he sighted Wade. His mouth opened, as if to voice a greeting, at the sight of Wade's crimson tunic. Then his startled glance shot to Wade's face, took in the matted beard.

Wade's light-luger was in his hand at the same moment that the guard drew his. Simultaneously, white flashes spat from both guns, the peculiarly loud whine of the shots breaking the silence.

Wade had thrown himself forward even as he squeezed the trigger, taking his fall into consideration as he aimed. The guard hadn't thought as speedily. An expression of horrified pain split his wide features, and his light-luger clattered to the pavement as he crumpled face forward after it. The acrid stench of burning flesh filled the air immediately, but Wade didn't need it to know he'd scored a hit.

Scored a hit and roused the other houses with the sounds of the shots. Wade didn't wait. He set out at a dead run for the landing platforms. Somehow they seemed miles away, and Wade, zigzagging wildly down the center of the street to destroy the aim of the guards whom he knew would be in pursuit, knew that luck and luck alone would enable him to reach the platforms alive.

Flashing light-lugers were already whining behind him, and Wade knew that luck wouldn't play partner long enough for him to reach the platform. Shouts from the street from which he had just fled, told him that the guards were pouring out after him. Soon, he knew, he'd be brought down by a searing light blast.

One block remained. One block between Wade and comparative safety. But even as he turned down its lighted pavements, he knew it would be too much. His light-luger was still in his hand, and he resisted a crazy impulse to turn and fight it out with his pursuers. His breath was tearing in his throat, rasping, choking him.

Flashing spurts from the light-lugers of his pursuers whined around his ears, and Wade knew that he'd be lucky to make fifteen steps more before one of those shots brought him down.

An then, to his right, he saw the glimmer of a neon conductor pole, a thin, column-like tube placed back three or four feet from the street edge. Wade aimed as accurately as his stumbling run would permit, his mind subconsciously registering the fact that the street lighting depended upon the power from this tube. Aimed and squeezed hard on the trigger of his light-luger. It was a direct hit.

The neon conductor tube shattered explosively, and the streets were thrown into utter darkness in the next instant.

Breathing a choked prayer of thanks, Wade darted sharply to the right, lurching onward to the space landing platforms. He gained the first platform two minutes later. He could hear the confused shouting of his pursuers ringing in the darkness behind him.

Wade clambered onto the second landing platform, heading for a row of small space fighter ships. If there was one ready—

There was, and Wade climbed inside its cabin just as he heard the footsteps of his pursuers clattering onto the first platform. Wade made his way to the control board and struggled into the pilot's seat. An instant later, and he threw the rocket throttle wide. His heart caught somewhere in his throat as he listened for the answering response. If the ship weren't charged—it was!

The deafening detonations of the rocket explosions belched sweet music in Wade Baron's ears, and orange streaks of flame splashed across the platform from the rear and side rockets of the tiny space fighter.

Wade released the gravity brake. Released the brake and felt the angry power of the rockets hurl him back against his seat as the ship hurtled upward toward space—and freedom!

CHAPTER VIII

Planet Twenty

PROFESSOR JARDON'S COSMIC MAP in his chart panel, Wade Baron sat at the controls of the tiny space fighter more than thirty hours later.

There had been no pursuit from the guards on Cardo. The darkness, the confusion, had evidently made them give up the idea of following Wade. A radiograph, Wade knew, had more than likely been issued to the Space Patrols, warning them of his escape. But Wade, taking an obtuse

course, stayed away from the space lanes.

And now, according to the interplanetary range chart of Professor Jardon, Wade knew that he was less than three hours away from the old scientist's fabulous planet, Twenty.

The strain was telling on Wade Baron, and his eyes were red and puffed from fatigue, his muscles screaming their demand for rest. But he clamped his jaw tighter, shaking the veil of weariness from his mind. He had to carry on. Once he reached Planet Twenty, there would be a chance for badly needed rest. But not until then.

"Not until then. Not until then. Not until then." The voice was a drone in Wade's ears, buzzing, humming, sleep-provoking. With a start, he sat bolt upright. He realized that the voice was his own, that he had almost fallen asleep at the controls. Looking at his panel he gasped. The time register told him that two hours had passed! His gaze shot swiftly forward to the visa-scope, and he threw back on his space brake violently, slackening speed.

He was rushing down on Planet Twenty!

It was less than a quarter of an hour later that Wade eased the space fighter gently along the smooth terrain of Twenty, slipping to a landing, less than three minutes after that when he clambered out of the space ship.

Wade had donned space-gear over his crimson Guard tunic, for he knew the atmospheric conditions of such a small planet would make such protection necessary.

Standing there, Wade gazed open-mouthed at the gleaming silver domes of a village-like cluster of buildings a quarter of a mile in the distance.

"Jardon's science structures," Wade breathed. His mind was still grappling with the realization that here was a planet about which no one—save himself—had any knowledge.

He moved forward then, toward the science structure village, a hundred questions in his mind. Questions concerning the power that lay within those silver-domed buildings. The power at which Jardon had only hinted.

Wade found himself on the streets of the strange, silent village five minutes later. On all sides of him were the silver-domed structures which, on closer inspection, resembled great dynamo turbines.

There was a tall, box-like building of chromealloy directly in the center of the village, and Wade made his way toward this. It was, he was fairly certain, the central laboratory about which Jardon had spoken in the electratyped documents.

The documents had stated that there, in the central laboratory, would be contained the information key to Planet Twenty and its treasures of scientific power.

The deserted streets seemed ghost-like, ominous, to Wade. And he recalled again that men had died, that Jardon had given his life, rather than reveal the secrets of these silent avenues.

WADE had taken forth the elctratyped documents as he climbed the steps leading to the door of the central laboratory. There were directions on these pages, directions which would lead him to the power he sought. Halting momentarily before the chromealloy door, Wade flipped swiftly through these papers until he found the page concerning the laboratories.

"In the fourth room in the center of the laboratory, a room marked ZR2, will be found the necessary information," Wade read.

He marched through the door, his space boots ringing hollowly along the aluminum floored corridors of the vast hall in which he found himself. A hall that was lined on either side by a series of doors numbered in the fashion of the one he sought.

Wade pushed back his curiosity concerning these other rooms. He knew that the scientific wonders of Planet Twenty were not confined merely to the power he was after, but the rest could wait. His mission was clear. First of all, to satisfy Jardon's dying wish and his own revenge, Matt Markham would have to be taken care of.

"Ah, there it is." Wade paused before a door on his right. "ZR2!"

He pushed in through the door, and found himself in a small room, utterly barren save for an oblong chest of a peculiar metal which stood in the center of the place.

Wade frowned as he walked over to the chest. He bent over, inspecting its odd construction. He tried the lid, and it swung open, revealing a small, blued-metal box resting on a sheaf of papers.

Lifting the box from the chest, Wade saw that it was equipped with a double

set of leather thongs, running along on either side of it. They looked as though they might be meant for a man to slip his arms through, like the straps of a knapsack.

Wade placed the metal box on the floor and pulled the papers from the chest. His brows creased bewilderedly at the title on the first of the papers.

Slowly, then, he began to read, now and again bending to inspect the small metal box and the series of dials on its flat surface. When he had finished the papers, Wade picked up the metallic box, slipping his arms through it, so that it hung suspended from his shoulders, dialed side facing outward. He had only to reach his hand to his chest to adjust the mechanism.

For a moment Wade stood there, continuing to study the papers which he had taken from the chest. Then he crossed the tiny room to the door, stepping once more into the corridor. He still held the papers in his hands, as he moved down the long hall toward the door by which he had entered the central laboratories.

Moments later, and Wade Baron found himself again in the silent streets of the science structure village. He moved along slowly, stopping every so often to inspect the turbine-like domed buildings.

"No wonder Markham wanted this information," he muttered in awe. "Good God, the havoc that could be wrought through it is more than incredible!"

Utter exhaustion was claiming the mind and body of Wade Baron, and he knew that he must rest before he collapsed there in the deserted ominous streets of Planet Twenty.

But after he was rested enough, once the fatigue was conquered, Wade had plans. Plans that involved Earth, and Matt Markham, and the reclaiming of Nada Warren—before it became to late to act. Before Markham had time to act.

Wade's red-rimmed eyes were utterly lacklustre from his weariness. But a fierce determination blazed in his soul.

He would need rest, he knew that. But it was a selfless rest he sought as he retraced his steps to the tiny space fighter on the outskirts of the science structure village. A selfless rest that would strengthen him enough to carry on from where Professor Jardon had left off, to settle a long-awaited score with Matt Markham, and to rid Earth of the menace of Markham's greed.

Even as he unstrapped Jardon's precious secret from his shoulders, placing it carefully in a compartment near the instrument panel of the space fighter, Wade knew that he would have to force himself to sleep. For the burning eagerness to get on with his mission, to get back to Earth, was a ceaseless throb in his temples.

Wade stretched out on the cushions of the control seats in the tiny space craft, deliberately closing his eyes, letting the blissful blanket of coma slip about his mind. Minutes later, Baron slept. . . .

IT WAS A REFRESHED, refurbished, newly resolved Wade Baron who sat behind the controls of the space fighter some twelve hours later. Planet Twenty—its secrets and strength symbolized by the small metallic box lying next to Wade—had faded back in the distance. Ahead lay Earth. Earth and Matt Markham.

Grimly, Wade pictured Markham's confusion and horror at the sight of the man he had thought condemned to a living death, pictured the swift and deadly justice that would come to Markham from Jardon's secret.

"I don't think," Wade muttered, "that Matt will have any welcome banners out for my arrival." Then he thought of Nada Warren, and the tiny muscles at the corner of his jaw tightened in a brief prayer. A prayer that he would arrive in time to prevent Markham from getting Nada. For Nada, thanks to Markham, thought Wade Baron was dead. Wade could vision Markham's phony condolences to Nada. Condolences that might make Nada turn to Markham for solace.

Hours slipped by as Wade drove the tiny craft mercilessly through space. In his mind he was forming a plan. It was obvious that he didn't dare land at Space Base in New York, for Government guards would seize him before he could reach Markham.

But there was a long unused and now deserted space landing base at Long Island. Wade decided to land at this point. From there he could make his way to Markham's palace at Government headquarters. For a while Wade had contemplated going directly to the Unifyer. He could place his information, information pointing to Markham's treachery before the Unifyer and leave the rest to the Government Leader.

This was the logical thing to do, if it weren't for the fact that Wade knew Markham had undoubtedly placed men in key positions close to the Unifyer. Men who would prevent any such information from reaching the highest official in Government.

Besides, Wade had a driving desire to see this through alone. In addition to the other scores that were to be settled with Markham, there was his own personal accounting to be demanded. Wade didn't want to relinquish this pleasure of revenge.

So Wade slipped to a landing, many hours later, at the long deserted space landing base at Long Island. He noticed, as he braked his tiny space craft into mooring at a rusty catch-tower, that there was no one about the place. Which was as he wished it.

Divesting himself of his space gear, Wade once more slid his arms through the knapsack-like harness attached to the metallic little box. When it was resting securely against his chest, he made several careful adjustments on the dialed front.

Moments later, and Wade stood alone on the deserted landing platforms.

"Now," he said to the silence surrounding him, "for a personal accounting with Matt Markham!"

CHAPTER IX

Face to Face

GOVERNMENT HEADQUARTERS in New York, located in the mile-high Unification Building, centered in the heart of the metropolis, buzzed with a suppressed excitement. On the top floor of the towering structure were the personal offices of Government Commissioner Matt Markham.

Behind an elaborate chromealloy desk, attired in the brilliantly crimson tunic of his military rank, sat Matt Markham, Commissioner. Blond and beefy, his face an inscrutable mask dominated by the coldness of his eyes, Markham faced three guard officers who stood at attention before him.

"This," Markham declared matter-of-factly, "is the day of reckoning. Our men, men loyal to your Commissioner and our Cause, have all received their instructions. To you three belongs the burden of this task." He looked at them for a moment of dramatic silence, then continued.

"Our plans have been carefully, exactingly made. There should be no flaw in the mechanism. Each and every man knows his exact duty. Each and every man knows our appointed zero hour, at which time he is to perform that task." He stopped again for an instant. "You men represent the inner guard. It is your duty to see that the armed forces of Government fall behind us in this plan."

A short, dapper little guard officer spoke.

"That will be taken care of, Commissioner. Everything will go through as scheduled. The rank and file of the guards, of course, know nothing of what is to happen. But the officers are so strategically placed that there should not be the slightest hitch in the plan. The men will follow the officers in control. We have seen to it that only officers loyal to our Cause will be alive when the zero hour arrives."

Markham smiled.

"Splendid, then. Our friend the Unifyer should be quite unpleasantly surprised within the next few hours!"

A thickset guard officer, heavily pock-marked, bared his lips in a jagged-toothed smile.

"The old fool will never know what happened to him."

"Neither," added Markham, "will the people."

Markham nodded, then, indicating the meeting was at an end.

"The next time I see you, gentlemen, it will be in the luxurious suite of the Unifyer. Good day, and good luck!" He gripped the hand of each briefly. Then they turned and left the room.

The pock-marked officer paused at the door.

"Good day, *Unifyer!*" he smiled.

Commissioner Markham smiled in return, and when the officers had gone he leaned back in his chair, a curious expression on his face, the lust of power in his cold eyes.

In just two more hours, Markham told himself, he would have complete control of Government. The neonboard on his desk flashed a deep purple, and Markham leaned forward, flicking the switch.

"Yes?" he said into the board receptor.

"Miss Nada Warren to see you, Commissioner," a voice answered in reply.

Markham's grin of self-satisfaction deepened.

"Send her in."

SEVERAL moments later Nada Warren entered the elaborate suite. Her ash-blond hair, falling to the shoulders of her black, close-fitting tunic, her delicately chiseled features, soft red mouth, and warm brown eyes, served to produce the usual sensations on Markham. Behind the cold glitter of his gaze, his mind was inflamed with the dancing sparks of desire.

"Nada!" Markham rose from behind his desk and stepped forward to meet the girl in the center of the room. He took her hands in his, and the touch of them served to make his beefy face flush deeper.

"Matt," Nada was speaking, "I've just come from the Patrol officers."

Markham's eyes narrowed.

"I told you, Nada, you must get reconciled to the fact. Any further search for poor Wade is useless. He's gone, Nada. Dead. I've checked the Patrol offices myself, every day for the last three months. If there was anything to indicate that Wade was still alive, they surely would have known."

Nada Warren seemed to crumble inside at the words.

"I, I suppose you're right, Matt. But I can't help clinging to some hope. You know how I feel about it."

Matt Markham forced himself to soften his tone.

"Sure, Nada, I know how you feel, poor kid. I feel the same about Wade myself. But we must accept the fact that he'll never return. Lost in a space wreck, poor devil. He's gone, Nada, and we must face it, the two of us."

Nada Warren turned tear-stained eyes to the man who held her hands in his.

"Matt," she said brokenly, "you've been splendid. I shall never be able to repay you for what you've done, for the consolation you've been to me."

Matt Markham was thinking: Yes you will, Nada, you'll be able to repay me. You're going to repay me, Nada, and sooner than you think.

Markham said:

"I don't expect any repayment from you, Nada. Wade meant much to me, too, don't forget it." He dropped her hands. "Sit down, Nada, and relax a bit. I've something I must tell you."

Nada Warren took a seat beside the huge chromarble desk.

Matt Markham brought forth a platnoid cigarette case, offered a cigarette to Nada, took one for himself. When he had lighted them both, he returned to his seat behind the chromarble desk.

"Funny," he said, blowing a cloud of blue toward the ceiling, "how many ancient customs have clung, in spite of civilization. We still smoke, for example, just as those in centuries before us."

But as Markham spoke he wasn't concerned with the words he uttered. He was thinking: Yes, many things are the same in spite of progress, Nada. The desire of a man for a woman. My desire for you. Civilization's progress hasn't been able to change things as basic as that. I want you, Nada, and I'll have you. I'll have power, too, beyond all reckoning, within this hour. Within this hour my men will strike. You don't know about that, Nada. But it doesn't really matter.

MARKHAM'S thoughts made him glance abruptly at his watch. Less than an hour. In less than an hour the revolt would be under way. He cleared his throat, shifting his gaze to Nada Warren, knowing that the words he spoke would have to be carefully chosen.

"We've learned to have much in common, Nada," he began.

Nada Warren nodded.

"Yes, Matt. I guess we've been thrown together pretty much these past three years."

Markham smiled. This was taking the trend he wanted.

"The two of us have been through much," he continued. Then, abruptly, "What do you think of me, Nada?"

Nada Warren was slightly startled by the question.

"Why," she said slowly, "I think that you're splendid, Matt. You mean a great deal to me—as a friend and companion. You know that, Matt."

Markham pursed his lips thoughtfully. This would have to well acted. Nada was no fool.

"Nada," he said, in an excellent imitation of painful resitancy, "I don't know if I should tell you this." He paused abruptly. "No forget it Nada," his expression was one of remorse, "forget I ever tried to tell you."

Nada Warren frowned.

"What, Matt? What is it you're trying to say?"

Playing his role to the hilt, Markham

shook his head sorrowfully.

"No, Nada, please forget it. I can't say it. I wouldn't be fair to the memory of Wade."

"Matt," Nada Warren's voice was soft, "Matt, please tell me what you're trying to say. Please."

Markham forced himself to keep his voice calm, with just the proper amount of torment in its undertones.

"I'd never say this, Nada, if Wade were still alive."

The girl remained silent, gazing at him in perplexity.

"Nada," Markham burst forth, "you've come to mean more than anything in the universe to me!"

"I, I, don't understand, Matt," the girl replied. "We've had much in common; you've been grand. I think you're fine. But for anything—"

Markham rose, face flushed.

"Nada!" he said huskily, "you have to listen to me, Nada. I want you, girl. I can make you happy. I can make you forget the tragedy of Wade's death. You think a lot of me, Nada. You said so. You'd make my life utterly complete, Nada!"

Nada Warren rose from her chair.

"Matt!" she said, and Markham could feel the shock in her voice, the bewilderment.

"Nada," Markham said desperately, "I'd never had told you, if Wade were still alive, believe me, Nada. Please believe me!"

Nada Warren's face had gone white, strained.

"Please, Matt. Please. You don't know what you're saying!"

Markham moved to where the girl was standing, reaching out and taking her hands roughly in his.

"Please, Matt!" The bewilderment in Nada Warren's voice, bewilderment and growing alarm, was lost on Markham. He pulled the girl toward him.

Nada freed herself in a quick twisting motion, retreating a few steps.

"Matt, don't, please. Don't!"

Markham's eyes glittered coldly, while cursing himself inwardly for his poor timing. But the die had been cast. It was up to him to force the thing through.

"I just want to give you happiness, Nada, that's all. I love you, Nada. I always have. Now that Wade is gone, can't you, won't you consider me?" His voice was hoarse, pleading.

"Matt, you're forgetting yourself!" The alarm had gone from Nada Warren's voice, to be replaced by icy frigidity. She fixed Markham with a cool level gaze, her eyes meeting his.

"Nada!" Markham's voice was strangled with passion and he moved toward her a second time.

His eyes, the lust he couldn't conceal behind them, made Nada gasp in terror.

"Matt! No! No!"

"I'll have you, Nada. Just as I'll have the world at my feet within the hour. I'll have the world to offer you, Nada. Riches, power, anything you want will be yours!" Markham had abandoned sham, abandoned pretension. His face was shining in unholy triumph, greed.

NADA WARREN had backed to the huge windows to the side of Markham's desk. Windows as wide as the other three walls. She felt their cool surface against her palms. Her heart was pounding wildly in terror, as she read the truth in his eyes. Her hand went to her red mouth.

"Matt!" she whispered hoarsely, *"you killed Wade!"*

Markham's laugh was savage.

"So you've figured it out, eh?" His voice became sharper. "Don't be a fool, Nada. I'll control the universe within this hour. I'll give you anything you want, girl. I'll have you whether you say yes or no!"

"You're mad!" Nada's voice was vibrant with horror and loathing for the man who advanced menacingly toward her.

Despairingly, Nada was aware that the window behind her was too thick, too solid, to smash her way through it. Through it to the streets a mile below.

"Don't come any closer," she choked, "stay where you are!"

"I want you, Nada," Markham leered, moving cat-like toward her. "I want you, and I'm going to have you!"

"No Markham. No, I don't think you are!"

Nada's glance shot to the far corner of the room, cloaked in heavy draperies. Markham halted, puzzled, bewilderedly, in his tracks. He turned automatically to face the intruder.

Nada Warren's voice came to him as he turned.

"Wade!" Nada gasped hysterically. "Wade!"

Wade Baron, mud-caked and bearded, gaunt and unsmiling, clad in a tattered crimson tunic, stood facing them! A small metallic box was strapped to his chest, and he held a light-luger unwaveringly in his right hand.

"Your draperies," Wade said with ominous softness, "provide an excellent listening post. You should have them removed, *friend* Matt!"

CHAPTER X

The Flame of Revolt

"BARON!" Markham's cry was choked, strangling. "Wade Baron!"

"You seem surprised, Markham." Wade said with the same deadly softness to his voice. "Didn't you expect any visitors? Or was it that you didn't expect any ghosts as visitors? For I am a ghost, Markham. A man you sent to Hell. Remember?" Wade was moving slowly toward him.

"No!" Markham's voice was a trembling moan. "You're dead, on Cardo. They told me you died there!" His hands shot convulsively to his jaw.

"Look into my eyes," Wade said quietly, menacingly, "look into my eyes and tell me what you see there. A soul? No, Markham, you killed that thing they call a soul!"

Nada Warren crumpled beneath the strain, falling forward in a faint.

Markham's hand flashed to his side, but Wade was quicker. He was across the room in a bound, smashing the side of his light-luger against Markham's unprotected cheek. The weapon for which Markham had grabbed thudded to the thick rugs, and he stumbled backward, holding his hand to the gash inflicted by Wade's blow.

"Don't get any ideas, Markham. I want to talk to you, before I take care of you for once and for all!" Wade grated.

"How did you get in here?" Markham bleated.

"That's unimportant. Take a seat behind that desk," snapped Wade, indicating his command with a movement of his light-luger.

Wade was beside Nada Warren, now, the hate in his eyes softening for a brief instant as he bent over her body. His light-luger, however, was still trained unwaveringly on Markham.

"Water," Wade indicated the decanter on Markham's desk. Hand shaking, eyes fixed in horror on Wade's light-luger, Markham complied. In a moment Wade was forcing the liquid down Nada's throat. She was whimpering softly, and he held her tenderly in his arms.

"Nada," he whispered, "Nada!"

The girl sat up, dazed, shaking. She looked at Wade, at Markham, still frozen in terror behind his desk.

"Wade!" she sobbed, burying her head in his chest.

Wade helped Nada to her feet, light-luger never leaving Markham's body for an instant.

"Go over there, dear," Wade said, pointing to the far corner of the room. Mechanically, Nada moved away, and Wade turned on Markham.

"Markham," Wade said with quiet menace, "we'll forget the things I've sworn to make you pay for—for the moment. I have a message for you. A message from another soul you ruined — Professor Jardon!"

Markham sat looking rigidly at Wade's pistol, wordless, hypnotized. A faint murmuring, a rumbling, drifted into the room from the huge windows by his sides.

"I've learned enough to fill the gaps during my absence from Earth, Markham. Jardon told me. A kindly, decent, splendid old man. The man you had kicked to death. Remember? He told me of your greed, your madness for power, and the way in which you intended to seize that power. I swore to him that I would prevent it, Markham. And I shall!"

Suddenly, as if coming out of a coma Markham leaned forward. The mention of Jardon, the reminder of his scheme, had changed him instantly.

"Baron," Markham said with returning confidence, "you're too late for your Girl Guide heroics. In another ten or twenty minutes I'll be supreme here on Earth, supreme in the councils of universal Government!"

Then his head cocked to one side, as the murmuring coming through the window grew sharper, louder. "Baron!" Markham rose from behind his desk, face flushed in triumph, "Hear that noise drifting up here from the streets?"

The sounds were stronger, a strange confused mixture of stacatto roaring. Wade, listening, paled slightly.

"That's the little coup you intended to stop, Baron!" Markham snarled with savage triumph. "It's started. No one is going to stop it, Baron. It means that in another hour I'll be Unifyer. My men are moving across the metropolis at this instant, sweeping on toward the Government quarters of the Unifyer. The army is behind them."

WADE stood rooted, facing Markham, doubt and anxiety mingled on his features.

"Harm me, Baron," Markham continued, "and it will be hell for you, hell for Nada, too!"

Wade had moved now, moved swiftly to the great window. He peered out, out down into the streets a mile below. It seemed as if thousand tiny ants swarmed excitedly, angrily around the streets. He knew, then, that Markham wasn't bluffing, that the hour of revolt was at hand!

Markham was laughing, now, laughing harshly.

"Go ahead, Boy Scout! Stop it. Stop it if you can!"

Wade was still facing Markham, light-luger trained on his enemy's body. His hand shot quickly to his chest, to a tiny dial on the lower right side of the metallic box strapped there.

"I'll turn it over to Jardon, to the hell he made for this emergency. The secret which you sought to wring from him!" Wade said evenly.

Markham's laughter was redoubled. "A little metal box, excellent!" His soft body shook with mirth. "Capital, Baron. A splendidly stupid bluff."

"Wait," Wade said, "perhaps you'll change your mind." His voice was level but his mind was chanting a desperate prayer, a prayer that beseeched his Creator to let the dream of the old man, Jardon's secret, not fail him.

Wade's gaze flashed momentarily to the great window, through which was pouring the increased volume of roarings from the street below. In the sky, he could see tiny red dots, doubtless space fighters controlling the revolt from the air. Wade knew that it was these space fighters of Markham's which would decide the fate of the battle. The Unifyer's loyal troops might crush an uprising on the ground but not while the insurgents controlled the air. Wade knew that Markham's space fighters must be conquered, destroyed before the revolt could be put down.

His hands flew to the metal box strapped to his chest, made swift adjustments. If Jardon's plan worked—

At that instant, as Nada screamed warning, Markham launched himself on Wade.

Wade had only time to half-wheel, as the heavy body of the other drove into him. He felt himself going down. The light-luger was still in his hand, and he brought it down heavily on the top of Markham's skull. Again, and again, until at last Markham went inert beneath the blows. Wade pushed him aside and rose to his feet, cheek torn from Markham's clawing hands.

He glanced quickly again through the great window. The huge clouds of scarlet-coated fighting ships were thundering in on the defenseless city, sending their streams of death blasting into the ranks of the Unifyer's troops.

A grim smile touched his lips as he felt a sudden throbbing hum emanating from the metallic box strapped to his chest. From across the uncharted expanses of space, from the silver-domed dynamos on Planet Twenty, power was flowing to him.

He waited anxiously, while precious seconds ticked away, while Markham's hordes of ships spewed destruction on the city, until suddenly an orange glow gleamed from a crystal indicator set on top of the metallic box.

Wade's jaw hardened. This was the moment. He moved closer to the window overlooking the vast panoramic view of the holocaust that raged below.

HIS fingers touched the master switch; the switch ominously and cryptically marked, RELEASE. For a frozen atom of eternity he breathed a silent prayer and then his lean fingers shoved it home.

The humming stopped for a split second; Then it crescendoed into a shrill whining roar of power. Wade felt the metallic box on his chest quiver as untold, unimaginable power poured into it.

For an instant the volume of power grew—and then—from the tiny inch-wide opening in the face of the metallic box a myriad of silver pellets began to pour.

Like angry wasps they flashed toward the window, smashing through it with savagely destructive power. Wade watched tensely as the silver pellets continued to blast from the metallic box and roar into the atmos-

sphere, swiftly gathering into white clouds above the scarlet-coated space fighters.

A savage exultation filled him. This was Jordan's secret. Electron bullets! Electron bullets powered by the mighty dynamos on Planet Twenty and possessing a destructive force beyond the imagination.

The stream of electron bullets had stopped now and Wade's fingers flew to the rheostats that controlled the flight of the silver streaks of death that had blazed from the metallic box. He made calculations desperately, adjusted the rheostat with trembling fingers that steadied suddenly, became sure, deft. It was if somehow, Old Jordan the scientist was beside him, cautioning him, advising him, even in death.

The silver hordes of electron bullets were plummeting downward now, diving into the closely-packed scarlet-coated space fleet of Markham.

Tiny streaks of death and destruction! For every hit they scored a space ship exploded with ear shattering detonations. Under Wade's miraculously inspired guidance the silver wasps of death flashed through the ranks of Markham's fighters, looping and circling, leaving in their hissing wakes a trail of tremendous explosions and carnage. The unhit ships rocked and swayed, tossed about helplessly by the mighty blasts that followed the destruction of their fellow crafts.

Wade's mouth set in a mirthless smile as he watched the destruction of Markham's crimson tube-ships. The remnants of the once-mighty fleet of space fighters were turning now, turning frenziedly and streaking away from the scene of battle.

The struggling in the streets, Wade could see, was slackening as the traitors turned their eyes to the heavens and saw what was left of their most powerful ally driven from the sky.

GRUNTING in grim satisfaction Wade swung the silver streams of electron bullets into the fray below. Again and again he sent hissing streaks of death flashing through the barricades outside the palace, mercilessly decimating the crimsoned ranks of the traitors.

Under this onslaught Markham's men broke at last, running madly, hysterically for shelter. It was then that the Unifyer's personal battalion, wearing the gold and purple tunics of the Home Guards, poured forth from behind the barricades they had set up to defend the palace.

It was then that Wade felt assured that the backbone of Markham's coup was shattered, and that the Home Guards would swiftly be able to restore order in the streets.

Every nerve, every fibre in Wade Baron's mind and body screamed tautly from the strain he had endured. His entire being was flooded with a vast and infinite weariness. The battle had raged only an hour, but in that hour Wade had been forced to project his command to every quarter of the hostilities. It had been a staggering, incredibly taxing job, but he had managed it. Managed it, and now watched the revolt turn into a route, as the Home Guard broke the remaining resistance among the shattered ranks of Markham's followers.

Wade, with the gesture of an ancient warrior sheathing a battle sword, flicked the dial that would end the wasps of death back to the silver-domed dynamos of Planet Twenty.

He felt no personal triumph, for it had been Jardon who had conceived this, whose staggering knowledge had given birth and actuality to this tool by which democracy had been preserved.

Wade ran a hand wearily across his browned lean features, through his lank, matted black hair.

His ears rang loudly from the sudden hush brought about by the cessation of the loud explosions. All was silent, save for the muted noises drifting ever more faintly up from the streets.

Suddenly Wade wheeled rapidly, thinking of Nada, of Matt Markham whom he had left unconscious on the floor. Wheeled, and turned ghastly white in sudden fear.

Both Nada and Markham were gone!

CHAPTER XI

Markham's Last Ace

WILDLY, Wade's gaze swept across the room. There wasn't a sign of the girl he loved, the man he hated. Despairingly, cursing himself for a fool, Wade realized that Markham had probably dashed for escape after coming out of the semi-conscious state in which he had left him. Dashed for escape, taking Nada Warren with him.

Wade realized that the deafening noises

of battle would have drowned any cries made by Nada, even had they penetrated his tremendous concentration at that time. He realized this and cursed again, starting toward the door.

There was no sign of them as Wade dashed through the outer offices of Markham's suite. There was no sign of them as Wade raced into the corridor. The elevator tubes, by which passengers were taken to the various floors of the towering Government Building, were, Wade found an instant later, not in operation. Naturally, at the start of the revolt everything else had ceased, and the operators had deserted their posts, probably leaving the tubes at the first floor of the building.

Which left only the emergency shaft passage out of the building. Wade started for this, certain that Markham, too, had been forced to use it. It was at the far end of the corridor, an opening to long successive flights of stairs which led eventually to the bottom of the gigantic building.

Wade was starting down the first of these stair-flights, when a muffled sound came faintly to his ears, bringing him to an abrupt halt. He waited there on the stairs, listening for a repetition of the sound, his heart hammering wildly at the realization of what it meant. The sound, seeming like a choked cry, had come from above, from the opening onto the roofs above. The roofs which, Wade remembered quickly, were used as space landing platforms by the building employees and officials.

The sound came again, and Wade knew it for what it was—a sob from Nada Warren!

In an instant Wade had turned on the stairs, and was dashing wildly upward once more, past the top floor, onward to the roofs, toward the vast landing platforms up there.

Even as he struggled gasping up the last flight, the flight leading directly out onto the roofs, Wade heard a grunted curse which could only have come from the throat of Matt Markham!

Less than a minute later, Wade burst out onto the roofs, onto the broad aluminoid space landing platforms. Burst onto the roofs and caught sight of Nada and Markham!

In that split-second, while time hung motionless, suspended, the tableau stamped itself indelibly on Wade's brain. There was a space craft there, in front of which Matt Markham struggled frantically with the wildly clawing Nada Warren. An object in Nada's hand—the wrist of which Markham held savagely—made Wade's glance shoot swiftly to the atomic motor of the space ship. It was cracked, useless, from a series of sharp blows. Blows that could only have come from the metal space landing bar which Nada held.

What had happened was now clear to Wade. Crystally clear. The space ship was the only one on the roof. Markham had contemplated making his escape in it. But Nada had somehow gotten the metal bar, opened the motor cowl and rendered the ship useless.

All this stamped itself on Wade's mind in the instant he stood there after emerging onto the roof. Then, snarling savagely at the sight of Markham brutally twisting the bar from the grasp of Nada, Wade went into action.

MARKHAM hadn't seen him emerge on the roof, had his back half-turned to Wade as he approached. But Nada, spying Wade, cried out sharply, and Markham wheeled just in time to catch a vicious smash on the side of the jaw. The blow drove him back and to the side, so that he sprawled on his knees beside the space ship.

Nada Warren had dropped the bar, and it slid to within an inch of Markham's hand. Wade, diving face forward for it, was too late. Groggily, Markham seized it and drove it in a smashing blow toward Wade's skull. It missed its mark, landing sickeningly, paralyzingly on Wade's shoulder, bone cracking beneath the impact.

Wade felt searing flashes of pain drive through his shoulder. Nevertheless he managed to roll free from a second blow and rise to his feet. Markham, too, was now standing, facing him, the bar held menacingly in his hand.

The fury of madness was in Markham's eyes, the blazing hatred of revenge in Wade's, as the adversaries faced one another.

"Wade!" Nada Warren's scream split the air, as Markham hurled the bar savagely at Wade's head. Hurled it savagely and cursed hoarsely as it snicked past Baron's head by inches.

Wade could feel that the arm which had taken Markham's first blow was useless, and automatically his right hand shot to his belt, pulling forth his light-luger.

Deliberately, Wade centered the gun on Markham's head, was sliding his finger to the trigger. Then, he lowered the luger, threw it far to one side of the platform, beyond the reach of either of them.

"To hell with it, Markham," Wade grated. "I could burn your damned brains out with that gun. But I'd prefer to beat them out. Beat them out, slowly, just to see them splatter the platform!"

Markham who had paled at the sight of the light-luger, then gasped in amazement as Wade tossed it aside, grinned ghoulishly. His eyes darting to Wade's injured arm. He knew that these odds would be better than ever for him. And he moved forward toward Wade with an animal-like growl.

In the next instant he drove in a flying tackle, catching Wade below the knees, smashing him to the platform beneath his crushing weight.

Kicking desperately, Wade rolled free, his good fist smashing twice into Markham's unprotected face. Smashing twice, to be followed by a driving blow from his elbow as he rose.

But Markham was on his feet also, and coming after Wade again, endeavoring to drive in toward him from the side he knew to be injured. Twice, Wade lashed out with his uninjured hand, sending Markham reeling back from the sledge-like force of the blows.

Their struggle had carried them more than twenty yards from the space ship, and now they were less than the same distance from the edge of the landing platform, from the sheer drop one mile to the streets below.

Wade was unaware of it, but Markham was cunningly forcing the struggle in that direction, forcing Wade back toward the lip of the platform, back toward that sheer drop to death.

AGAIN Markham carried the fight, butting in toward Wade with his bull-head lowered, arms lashing clumsily, yet tellingly against Wade's ribs and face. And again Wade managed to slip most of the blows, to send several more thudding into Markham's soft midriff.

But the struggle was horribly unequal. Markham had the odds, and he was playing them to the hilt. He knew that he had merely to keep his eyes on Wade's uninjured arm. For from there, and there only, could Wade do damage.

Wade was further impaired by the presence of the metallic control box, Still strapped to his chest. Its straps confined even his uninjured arm, making quick movement difficult. Steadily, therefore, he was forced to yield ground to the dogged charges of Markham.

Perspiration clouded his vision, and his matted lank hair slipped constantly over his eyes. But Wade fought on with a desperate fury born of stark revenge, lashing, lashing, backing step by step, as Markham kept coming in.

Wade was less than ten yards from the edge of platform when another rush from Markham made him retreat a step as he drove his fist into his adversary's now bloody face. It was then that he slipped.

He felt himself falling forward, but was powerless to stop, and he felt Markham's huge bulk hurtling down on him as the platform rushed up. Another instant and Markham landed on his chest, driving every last breath of air sickeningly from his lungs. Groggily Wade tried to roll out from underneath him, fighting for breath as he did so.

To Wade's amazement Markham had risen to his feet, was weaving blindly, holding his hands to his eyes, his face pouring blood. And in that instant, Wade realized that Markham's face must have struck full force against Jardon's metal box on his chest, been badly lacerated by the stunning impact.

Somehow, Wade struggled to his feet, blinking back the sweat from his eyes, the sight of the weaving Markham dancing fuzzily in his vision. He started out after that vision, a scream shrilling in his ears as the vision of Markham suddenly vanished!

Someone was holding him, wiping the blood and sweat from his face, sobbing, crying his name. The fog cleared and he saw Nada.

"Over the edge," Nada was sobbing hysterically. "He was blinded with blood, and staggered over the edge of the platform! You started to follow him, but I stopped you in time! Oh Wade, Wade!"

NADA WARREN was waiting outside chambers of the Unifyer when Wade emerged the following day. Her face, glowing with possessive pride and happiness, shone especially brightly at the sight of Wade's clean-shaven lean features, carefully combed black hair, and smiling wide mouth.

"You look a little different, Wade," she said, taking his arm as they moved toward the door together. "So differently that I'll bet you impressed the Unifyer into handing over an odd planet or two!"

Wade paused there in the hall, beside the main door where the Home Guards in purple and gold stood stoically at attention, and put his hands on Nada's shoulders.

"Look, honey," he said, drawing her closer, "we don't want any planets today. Or tomorrow, either, for that matter of fact. All we want is what I asked for, and got, that soft berth in the survey department of Government. A soft base on Earth, good old terra-whatcha-m'call-it, huh?"

"Terra firma, honey," Nada replied, "terra firma!"

Wade looked pained.

"If you're going to start picking on me already, we might as well get married pronto. Make the persecution legal, huh?"

Nada Warren disregarded the stolidly watching sentries, disregarded everything, in fact, except her answer to Wade Baron's question. . . .

« « WOULD YOU BELIEVE . . . » »

. . . that for the past ten years radio engineers have been receiving, on specific wave lengths, a small but easily discernible amount of static coming from interstellar space? Scientists have ascertained that this static comes from the stars, but are not at all sure as to how it is produced. Could other planets be trying to communicate with ours?

. . . that—in spite of fiction to the contrary—there is no such thing as a silencer on a gun, a double-jointed human being, or blood tests to ascertain the race coloring of a child's unknown parent?

. . . that far more people suffer from an inability to see as well in daylight as at night, than the inability to see as well at night as in the day?

. . . that it is a matter of scientific fact that people who have been hypnotized and told to perform a certain act on a specified date, have—months after the hypnosis—performed the act on the precise day they had been told to?

. . . that it is utterly impossible to successfully feign insanity in front of a competent psychiatrist? There are certain actions which psychiatrists can provoke to tip them off inside of several minutes as to the truth or fakery of their subject.

. . . that the number of possible moves on the part of each player during the first six moves in a game of chess exceed 4,000,000,000?

. . . that brain versus brawn in personal combat might be best exemplified in favor of the former inasmuch as the scientific art of jujitsu—Japanese wrestling—enables one man skilled in its science to successfully defeat as many as a dozen brawny adversaries at one time?

. . . that, less than ten years ago in France, when workers were draining out an obsolete dock, an old submarine was discovered concerning which naval authorities and departments or records throughout Europe could find absolutely no record? And in addition to this, there was not a soul who had the slightest recollection of the craft ever having existed before!

. . . that in the plant kingdom there is a Guatemalan tree which kills other trees by growing up and around them, gradually choking them to death?

. . . that medical men have proved that the skin of one person cannot successfully be grafted upon that of another? The only successful manner of grafting skin is to take it from one part of a person's body and transplant it to another.

. . . that there are fewer lunar than solar eclipses? It is true that more people have witnessed lunar eclipses, but this is due only to the fact that these are visible for a longer time than the more often occurring—and shorter lasting—solar eclipses.

. . . that an electron is so small that if a baseball and an electron could be magnified proportionately until the baseball was as large as the earth, the electron would still be too tiny to be seen with the naked eye?

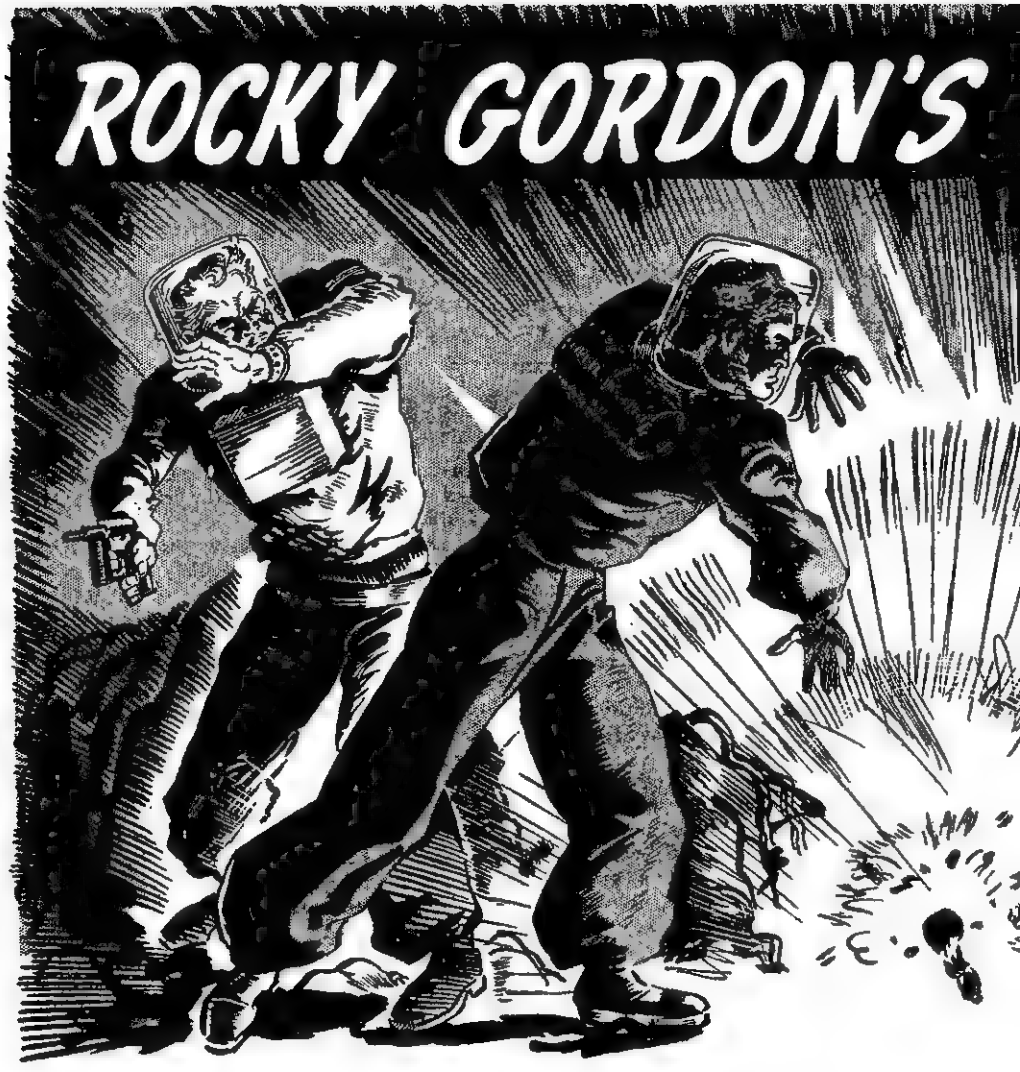
. . . the oldest living things in the world exist right here in our own North American continent. They are, of course, the famous California redwood trees, which are over three thousand years old. These trees have the additional distinction of being direct descendants of trees which survived a million years ago in the Tertiary period.

. . . the ore from which commercial radium is extracted is mined from arid desert lands? Strange as this sounds it is literally true. From appropriately-named Paradox valley in Colorado, the huge radium quarries turn out the mineral ore which is then shipped to New Jersey, where the elaborate process of extraction and concentration is conducted.

. . . that experimental locomotives, propelled by propellers in the same manner as an airplane, have attained greater speeds than those of conventional design.

. . . human navigation instruments are, as yet, inferior to those which nature has provided those of her kingdom? For what plane could duplicate the feat of the golden plovers, which fly "blind" from Nova Scotia to Brazil? And the salmon, which traverse the depths of the sea to arrive unerringly at a particular river or stream, puts any human navigator to shame.

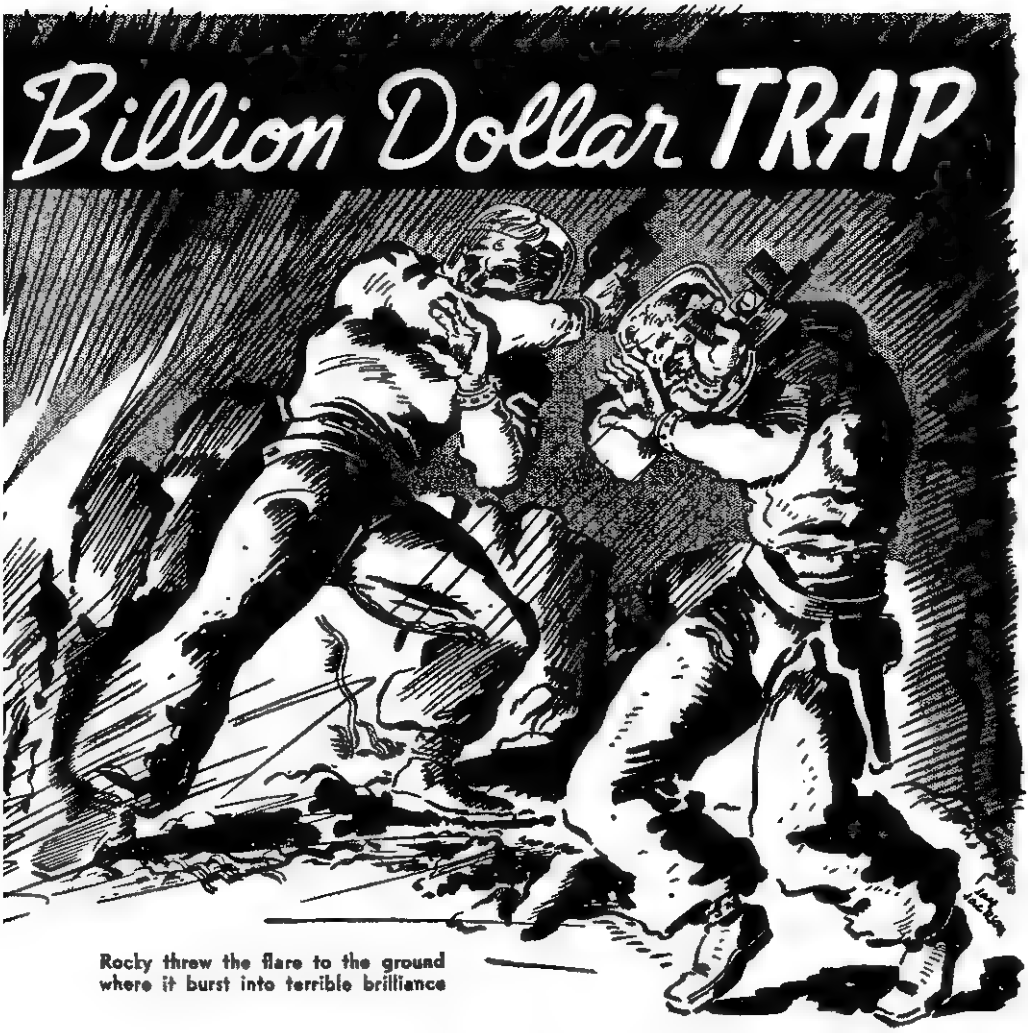
ROCKY GORDON'S



By Robert Moore Williams

The greatest treasure in the whole solar system is a funny thing to stake against the capture of an outlaw, no matter how necessary it may be to get him. But Rocky Gordon was staking his life too, and a billion dollars can't compare there!

Billion Dollar TRAP



Rocky threw the flare to the ground where it burst into terrible brilliance

"ARE you going to walk out of this air lock under your own power," said Red Hatch, "or am I going to have to put a bullet through you and throw you out?"

"I'll walk out," Rocky Gordon answered bitterly. "As long as you're holding that gun on me, I haven't any choice. But damn you, if we ever meet again, you're going to be sorry you didn't put a bullet through me when you had the chance."

Clad in a space suit, with oxygen for only twelve hours, weaponless, without food or water, the husky young prospector stepped out of the air lock and onto the frozen rocks of the asteroid. No sooner had his feet touched the ground than he pivoted, and ducking low to avoid the gun he knew was pointed at him, drove at the man in the air lock. If he could only get his hands on Red Hatch! If he could only come to grips with the man? If—

"Thought you'd pull a fast one!" Hatch grunted, stepping back. "I was expecting something like that, so if you insist on having a dose of lead in your guts, just keep on coming."

Rocky Gordon stopped. The gun was looking him right in the eye. Hatch was out of reach.

"Damn you!" he gritted. Since he and Hatch were both in space suits, the conversation was carried on by means of the compact radio equipment built into the suits. "I picked you up out of a dive on Callisto and gave you a chance to earn

an honest living prospecting. Everybody warned me about you, said you were no good, that you'd stab your best friend in the back. But I wouldn't listen. I thought I could make a man out of you. And what happens? We find the golden asteroid*, that's what happens.

"We find the chunk of rock that every prospector in the asteroid belt has been looking for for years. There's enough gold in it to make a hundred men rich. And you'll get your share. But instead of taking your honest share, you jump me! You dump me here, with twelve hours of oxygen left, so you can grab the whole asteroid.

"All right, buddy. If I die here you can be damned certain of one thing—that I'll be waiting for you in hell."

"Is the speech over?" Hatch jeered.

"Yes, damn you, it's over!"

"Okay then. There's only one thing wrong with you, Gordon; you're a sucker. Out here it's every man for himself. If I hadn't jumped you, you'd have jumped me. You're damned lucky that I'm even leaving you here alive—" The burly prospector paused.

"On second thought," he continued. "Why should I leave you alive? With you dead, the golden asteroid is mine. With so much at stake, I'll just not take the chance of leaving you alive, Gordon—"

The gun came up.

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* What is known as the asteroid belt was formed by the breakup of a major planet that once existed between Mars and Jupiter, with the result that uncounted thousands of jagged chunks of rock exist in this region of space, the largest being Vesta, with a diameter of 400 miles. Since the advent of space travel, this region has been assiduously prospected by hard-bitten mariners searching for the rich veins of metal to be found there. One of the toughest of this tough gang was Parson Vinson, evangelist-prospector, who claimed to have discovered the asteroid that contained the mother lode of gold of the planet that broke up. Parson Vinson would never reveal the location of this golden asteroid. Many legends have grown up around him and the rich find he made and innumerable prospectors have searched for the golden planetoid, without ever finding it. The prospecting evangelist died in 2327, while preaching in a Martian space port in a magnificent new church, built with funds obtained from his inexhaustible source and donated to wayward space sailors. He passed away without ever revealing the location of the golden asteroid.—Ed.

BUT Gordon was already moving. Through the clear glassite of his helmet, he had read Hatch's intentions. He leaped to one side, raced toward the stern of the ship. Out of the corner of his eyes, he saw smoke leap from the gun. In this airles void, there was no sound, but the thud of the gun, sent out over the radio transmitter, smacked in his earphones. He didn't know how close the bullet came. It didn't hit him. An instant later the stern of the ship afforded momentary protection.

"I'll get you yet," Hatch's voice came over the radio.

Hatch was coming. Gordon looked quickly around. He couldn't get back into the ship. The bleak, rocky surface of the asteroid met his gaze. To the right was a deep gash. Jammed full of boulders, it offered a chance to escape. Rocky Gordon raced toward it.

The explosion of his erstwhile partner's gun shuddered in his earphones. Hatch had come around the ship and was shooting again. Gordon ducked down into the boulder-studded gulch, slipped from rock to rock. Even though he couldn't hear them, he knew bullets were whanging around him. The constant thud of the gun in his earphones told him that bullets were coming.

On this small asteroid there was almost no gravity. Consequently Gordon went down the gulch with great kangeroo-like leaps. He traveled with amazing speed. Every time an explosion sounded in his earphones, he went faster. Within a few minutes he was out of range of the pistol. Panting, he paused and looked back. Hatch was no longer following him.

"By the time your oxygen runs out, you'll wish you'd stopped one of those slugs and found yourself an easy way to die," Hatch's voice came over the radio."

"Go to hell!" Gordon answered.

He watched Hatch enter the ship. The rockets shot fire and the little flier blasted from the ground. Rocky Gordon shook his fist at it.

"Damn you," he yelled, increasing his transmitter to full power in the hope that Hatch could still hear it. "If I don't die here, I'll come looking for you. We found the golden asteroid together and half of it is mine. Do you hear me—half of that gold is *mine!*—"

He stopped abruptly. Shouting was

only using up precious ogygen without getting him anywhere. He watched the ship vanish into the distance.

ASTEROID prospectors are a tough breed. They have to be tough to survive among those millions of circling chunks of rock that make up the asteroid belt. Rocky Gordon wasted no time swearing at the fate that had left him marooned here. A swift examination of the pockets in his space suit revealed his total resources. They were meager: a pocket knife, a small coil of wire, several quartz samples, a plug of "Prospector's Choice" chewing tobacco, and two small magnesium flares.

The flares he seized eagerly. Magnesium burns with a blinding white light and these flares were of the type used to send up distress signals. No prospector was ever without them, for if something went wrong with his ship, there was a dim chance that he might use the flares to summon help.

There was a dim chance that Gordon might use them for the same purpose, if —and it was a big *if*—a ship should happen to pass near enough to the asteroid where he was marooned to be seen.

"About one chance," he said, scanning the sky, "in a thousand."

He sat down to wait. He had no choice except to wait. Running around would only burn up precious oxygen that much faster. A tenderfoot would have chased all over the asteroid, but Gordon was no tenderfoot. If he didn't move a muscle, breathed shallowly, his oxygen might last twenty hours. He put one of the magnesium flares back in his pocket, got the other one ready, and watched the sky.

An hour passed. Two hours. Four hours. Gordon was beginning to sweat. No rocket flare had showed in the sky. Nothing showed there except the asteroids circling against the black backdrop of space. No ship. No sign of a ship. Another hour passed. No ship. Gordon had quit sweating. He was too cold to sweat.

Suddenly, on the boulder-studded surface of the asteroid, he saw something moving. He leaped to his feet. The thing moved again. There was no doubting what it was. A tank tractor! One of those lumbering enclosed vehicles used by prospectors on the larger asteroids! There was a tank tractor here!

"Help!" he shouted into the transmitter.

The occupant of the tractor didn't seem to hear him. The vehicle was over two miles away, so far it looked like a crawling bug. And it was going farther away.

"You in the tractor," he shouted. "Wait for me."

There was no answer. Perhaps the occupant didn't have his radio receiver turned on. Rocky started to run toward it. He had not taken two steps before he was panting for breath. His head began to reel. He knew what was wrong. He had cut his oxygen down to low. He turned the valve to full output, panted while he waited for the life-saving gas to trickle into his helmet. The tank was getting farther and farther away.

And no oxygen was hissing into his helmet from the container! Frantically, he jiggled with the valve. No more gas came. He looked at the gauge, jerking the container around from his back where he could see it.

The gauge said empty. Empty! He hadn't had a full tank of oxygen, only a partly-full tank. He had used it all.

THE tractor was almost out of sight now.

"Help!" he shouted into the transmitter. Without oxygen he could not overtake the tractor. It would slip away from him. His radio didn't seem to reach it. Every foot that tractor traveled took life that much farther away from him.

There was only one chance left—the magnesium flare. Gordon pulled the firing pin and tossed the flare on the ground ahead of him. It exploded into a burst of blazing white light, light that blinded him. The whole surface of the asteroid seemed to burst into flame, so brilliant was the magnesium flare. The light was so bright it beat through his closed eyelids, sent flashing bursts of pain into his brain. And—his oxygen was gone! Gone! His head was whirling. Blinded, with consciousness fading, he sank to the ground.

HE awakened to find a burning liquid trickling down his throat. He gulped at it and it gave him strength. Sitting up, he found his helmet had been removed. He was in the tractor. Two tough-looking hombres were bending over him.

"You feelin' better, bud?" one of them said.

"Yes," Gordon answered, sucking gratefully at the warm air in the tractor. "Thanks—you saved my life."

"We saw your flare and came to see what was going on. What were you doing out here in the middle of nothing with no equipment? Where's your ship?"

"Gone," Gordon answered. "My partner stole it and marooned me here," he explained, cursing feelingly.

The two men exchanged glances.

"That's too bad," one of them said sympathetically. "How'd he happen to do that?"

"He wanted the ship," Gordon explained. He said nothing about the golden asteroid.

Again the two men exchanged glances. "Well," one of them said. "I guess we'll take you into—into camp."

"Thanks," Gordon answered. "You don't know how much I appreciate this."

"Sure, we understand. You appreciate it so much that you don't mind if we blindfold you before we take you in!"

"What? Blindfold me!" Gordon gasped, startled. "What the devil for?"

One of the men grinned. There was nothing pleasant in the grin. He picked up a dirty rag from the floor of the tractor, expertly began to fold it into a blindfold.

"Our camp is kind of a secret," he explained. "We like to keep it that way. Now if you'll just close your eyes like a good little boy, we'll all pretend that ye're playing tag and that you're *it*."

Gordon stared at the two men, his eyes narrowing.

"You're—" he gasped, horrified recognition in his voice.

"You guessed it, bud," the man with the blindfold snapped. "We're a couple of King Judson's men. King Judson has a nice little hideaway here on this particular asteroid that even the space patrol has never been able to find. He wants to keep his hideaway a secret, especially from strangers who drop in unexpectedly. So it's a blindfold for you. And no funny business, bud, if you don't want to wake up and find yourself full of holes."

Gordon gulped. A gun had appeared in the hands of the man. It was pointed straight at him.

"Okay," he said. "You don't have to be so all-fired tough about it, do you?"

KING JUDSON was an outlaw, a space bandit. And a rough, tough customer he was reputed to be. Very few people had ever seen him, except his own men. Usually those persons who accidentally saw him, or who met him against his wishes, died very suddenly. Manning speedy fliers, his men dashed out from hidden refuges and took a heavy toll of interplanetary traffic. The space patrol had chased him from Jupiter to Mercury and back again, without ever catching him in spite of the fact that the members of the patrol individually and collectively would have given their eye teeth for a crack at King Judson. Many of them had given their lives.

And the two men in the tractor were King Judson's men! He had a secret hideout here in the asteroid belt. No *wonder* the patrol had never been able to catch him!

Rocky Gordon carefully kept his hands at his sides as the blindfold was fitted over his eyes. The tractor started with a lurch. He heard it grinding over the rough surface of the asteroid. Sweat was gathering on his face but he didn't dare lift his hands to wipe it away.

The tractor lurched to a halt. Gordon felt the blindfold being removed. His first glance told him that he was in a cavern that had been hollowed out under the surface of the asteroid. His two captors opened the door of the tractor. He stepped out. King Judson and four of his men were waiting for him.

Judson wasted no time inquiring about the weather.

"Who are you?" he snapped.

"Rocky Gordon," Gordon answered.

The men stirred uneasily as he said the words.

"There's a Gordon who is in the space patrol," one of them muttered.

"You don't need to tell me there is," the prospector answered. "Once in a joint on Ganymede I told them my name was Gordon and I nearly got killed before I could convince them I wasn't the Gordon who is in the patrol."

"Yeah?" King Judson said. He was a short, powerfully built man with the harsh gray eyes of the natural-born killer. "What are you doing here?"

The prospector explained what had hap-

pened. No trace of emotion on his face, the outlaw listened.

"This fellow Red Hatch," Judson questioned. "You said you took him out of a dive on Callisto. How long ago was that and what was the name of the dive where you first met him?"

"What difference does that make?" Gordon parried hastily. "It's enough for me that I ever met the dirty double-crosser!"

"It's not enough for me," the outlaw said. "You've got exactly thirty seconds to answer my question."

Judson's voice had changed. There was death in it, sudden death. Gordon caught the change. He hastily told the outlaw what he wanted to know.

Judson spoke to one of his men in a voice so low Gordon could not hear what he said. The fellow left at a run.

"Take him away," said the outlaw. "Lock him up for awhile."

PUZZLED, Gordon was led to a cave and thrust in. A heavy door slammed on him and he sat down on a rude cot to think.

He was really in trouble. King Judson was no man to fool with. And it began to look as though there was more to the man than could be seen on the surface. What was his reason for the questions he had asked? What had he said to the man he dispatched on that mysterious errand? Where *was* the man going, and what *was* he to do when he got there?

Shaking his head, Rocky Gordon stretched out, relaxing. But he could not sleep. For several hours he lay there, then he heard someone at the door.

A man came in, gun leveled.

"Come on," he said shortly. "Judson wants to finish that conversation you were having with him."

Finish the conversation! Gordon's blood chilled. In what way? What kind of a man was Judson? Was he mad? In a moment he stood before the outlaw chief. He would find out now.

The outlaws stood in a silent, tense circle surrounding Gordon. The prospector's eyes went from face to face in that stern circle. He saw no sympathy anywhere.

The man who had gone on the mysterious mission was whispering to the outlaw chief. Judson listened, turned to Gordon.

"Okay," he said. "I had this man radio Callisto and have one of my men there verify your story. It checked all right. You actually met Hatch as you claimed."

Gordon exhaled his breath in a panting, incredulous sigh. So that was why Judson wanted to know where and when he had met Hatch. The outlaw was checking up on his story!

"In this business, we have to check everything," Judson said. "I just wanted to make certain you were what you claimed to be. I didn't want a patrolman dropping in here and giving us a song and dance about being marooned when all he was really doing was trying to locate our hideout."

"You needn't worry about me," Gordon said. "I've got no use for that patrol either. I'll never report your hideout to them. "Come to think of it," the prospector laughed. "I couldn't report you if I wanted to, because I don't know where I am."

"I know that," Judson said drily. "As a matter of fact, we're not worried about you reporting us. You see, Gordon, we're going to cut you in with us, we're going to let you join our organization."

"What!" the prospector gasped. "You're —but—I mean—"

"Sure, I know how you feel," the outlaw continued smoothly. "This is rather sudden, and all that. It works both ways, Gordon. You join us so you won't ever be tempted to report our little hideout, and in return we'll help you."

"H—help me!" Gordon stuttered.

"Of course. It's too big a job for you to handle all by yourself. You're certain *to need help in mining the golden asteroid!*"

Gordon's brain throbbed with the meaning of the words. He swallowed hastily. "W—what are you talking about?" he demanded. "Have you found the golden asteroid that old Parson Vinson once found? Are you asking me to help mine it? Do you need an experienced prospector to help you? Is that what you mean?"

"Quit stalling, Gordon," Judson rapped out. "We know good and well that you've found that chunk of gold. Our radio operator overheard you and Hatch talking when he marooned you here. I sent a couple of boys out in the tractor to find you and bring you in. Did you think they just accidentally stumbled on to you? Well,

they didn't. You've found the golden asteroid, Gordon, and you're leading us to it, *or else!*

The outlaw spat out the words like a machine gun spitting out bullets. And like the slugs from a machine gun, there was death in the words.

GORDON had drawn back. His face worked convulsively as conflicting emotions chased themselves over it.

"You got me wrong," he said huskily. "Your radio man didn't understand what I was saying. Hatch just wanted my ship. He—we—I haven't found—what you think I have."

"So you're still trying to lie out of it," Judson said. "Well, I don't blame you. If I knew where that much gold was located, I wouldn't admit it either. But you can't get away with it, Gordon. I know what you've found. Are you going to talk or am I going to have to take measures to make you talk?"

The prospector's face had become a sullen mask. He shook his head.

"I don't know anything," he insisted.

"Stubborn, eh? *Boys!*"

At Judson's single spoken word, the tense circle of outlaws moved toward the prospector. Slowly they began to close in around him. Gordon's fists came up.

"If you think you can lick all these men," Judson said as the prospector's fists came up, "you're badly mistaken."

"Maybe I can't lick 'em," Gordon ground out. "But what good will it do you to kill me? Then you'll never find out what you want to know."

"They're not going to kill you," the outlaw said easily. "They're just going to change that nice Roman nose of yours into a pug, they're going to transform those big ears of yours into something that even a cauliflower wouldn't recognize, and they're going to kick your teeth down your throat. After that, if you still won't talk, we'll really get to work on you."

Slowly the circle of men moved nearer and nearer to the prospector. An inch at a time the outlaws advanced. They were in no hurry. From the look on their faces, they expected to enjoy what was going to happen. The longer it was prolonged, the better they would like it.

Suddenly Rocky Gordon dropped his fists.

"All right," he whispered shakily. "You win. You don't have to beat me up. I'll talk. I'll tell you where the golden asteroid is located, under one condition: that as soon as gold is mined, you'll give me my share and let me clear out."

"Sure," Judson said, his voice soft and soothing." "Sure. You needn't worry. You'll be taken care of all right. All you have to do is take us to this asteroid."

EIGHT hours later, the outlaw ship, with the shaking Rocky Gordon as its guide, was dropping down to the rocky surface of one of the larger asteroids. This particular chunk of rock had a diameter of almost one hundred miles.

"Over there just under that peak," Gordon said, pointing. "There's an old, abandoned mine shaft there. You can see it from the sky before we land. It goes into the peak at a slant and it ends right in the heart of the damnedest ledge of gold you ever saw."

The outlaws were alive with eagerness. All of them had heard of the story of Parson Vinson and the gold that he had found. Now they were going to get the gold. Only King Judson remained imperturbable and aloof, his eyes scanning the sky.

"We'll circle before we land," the outlaw chief directed. "Make certain nobody is lurking around the place."

He was cautious, that outlaw chief, cautious and suspicious. And always on the alert for a trap. Not without reason had he evaded the space patrol for so many years. He didn't suspect anything here, but he was cautious by force of habit.

Rocky Gordon was alternating between black despair and enforced hilarity. One second he was sunk in gloom, the next he was trying to be gay. He had few illusions about this outlaw chief. Too many whispered stories had gone around the planets about King Judson for the prospector to have much doubt about what was going to happen to him, once he had revealed what lay at the bottom of that mining shaft.

"It sure is nice of you to take me in," he said over and over again. "It sure is white of you to cut me in on this gold and then let me take my share and go. I can't begin to tell you how much I appreciate it."

"You don't have to tell me," Judson

answered. To the man at the controls he said. "You can set her down now. I can see the shaft Gordon told us about and there's nobody around."

The ship slid to a halt on the rocky surface. The men hastily began donning space suits, since there was no air on this chunk of frostbitten rock. Gordon, having been supplied with a fresh tank of oxygen, was getting into his own suit again.

Judson detailed five men to remain on guard in the vessel.

"The rest come with me," he ordered tersely. "You too, Gordon. I want you to show us how to get into that shaft."

Through the glassite helmet, Gordon could see the outlaw's face. There was a sardonic smile on it that sent his heart down into his boots.

"You mean—" he quavered. "You mean you're going to take me down into the shaft but I'm not coming out again?"

"How'd you ever guess it?" Judson's voice rasped over the radiophone.

"But you promised—"

"Sure. I promised you'd be taken care of. Get moving now. Grab Gordon, two of you men. He might try to make a break for it."

Before the prospector could protest again, he found himself seized by two of the outlaws.

"All you have to do is walk, buddy," they said. "Just walk."

ROCKY GORDON walked. Inside his helmet his face was dank with perspiration. He shot quick glances to the right and left, to the sky overhead. But the two outlaws never relaxed their grip. Suddenly Gordon stumbled.

The two men jerked him to his feet. "No use in trying that, buddy," one of them growled. "You're cold turkey. Just keep walking."

Gordon walked. He didn't stumble again. Nor did he try to beg for his life. Surreptiously he watched the black surface of the nearest asteroid. It was miles away, hanging in the sky like a dark moon.

A thin flare of fire had begun to blossom against that black surface. It was joined by another flare, and then another.

The outlaws stopped suddenly. They looked at the fire flares. The group was suddenly tense.

Down, from the black surface of that asteroid hanging in the sky, came—three rocket ships. Swiftly the flare of their rockets grew in the sky.

"Patrol ships!" one of the outlaws gasped.

Gordon was aware that King Judson's eyes were drilling him through and through.

"Those are patrol ships, Gordon?" the outlaw chief rasped. "What's the mean —"

"I'll tell you what the meaning is," the prospector shouted into his transmitter. "I'm Rocky Gordon the patrolman, not Rocky Gordon, the prospector. *And this, King Judson is a trap!*

"Red Hatch and I planned this between us. Did you think you accidentally overheard our radio conversation when Hatch was supposedly marooning me on the asteroid where your hideout is located? Well, it wasn't an accident. You were supposed to overhear that conversation. The patrol suspected you had a hideout there, but we had never been able to find it.

"So Hatch and I put on an act for your special benefit, with a lot of conversation and shooting to make it seem realistic. We even started back in Callisto a couple of months ago, figuring you would check on my story. We knew your men would overhear our radio conversation, and we knew that as soon as you heard the golden asteroid mentioned, you'd come out of your hideaway. You wouldn't be able to resist a chance like that. And we knew you would force me to guide you to the golden asteroid, by torture, if necessary.

"Hatch and I located this old mining shaft, and then put three patrol vessels on the nearest asteroid to be on the lookout. Hell, Judson, this isn't the golden asteroid, if there is such a thing. This is a trap. And you, the cautious, careful, check-everything King Judson, fell into it like the biggest sucker on the nine planets!"

The youthful patrolman's words seemed to freeze the outlaws. Without moving, they stared at him. Then their eyes went back to the three ships in the sky. The ships were closer now, so close that flight was impossible.

"We've caught you boys at last!" Gordon grated. "You gave us a chase, but we caught up with you in the end. Before you can get your ship into the sky, those

three vessels will have bombed you out of existence. Lay down your arms. You're all under arrest."

The outlaws were caught beyond a hope of escaping. Two of the patrol ships were circling in the sky. The third was already slanting toward a swift landing. If the outlaws ran back to their own ship and attempted to flee, they would be completely at the mercy of the two fliers in the sky. They were caught. Caught!

"Lay down your arms!" the patrolman ordered. "You're all under arrest."

"Is that so?" one of the bandits grated. "Well, we may be caught, but before we go out, you'll get your's, you—"

THE gun was jerked up to point at Gordon. Weaponless, he didn't have a chance to defend himself. He had known he was running this risk when he planned the trap, but it was just another risk that a patrolman had to run.

His only chance was to try to run. It wasn't a chance, and he knew it. Before he took two steps, slugs would tear through his space suit, through his body. He didn't even try to run. He stayed to face the gun. The bandit's glove tightened around the trigger.

"Drop that gun!" the outlaw chief commanded.

The man stared at Judson in perplexity. "But, chief," he protested. "We'll all hang anyhow. Let me fix this damned patrolman before we go out."

"We're not caught yet," the outlaw chief grated. "And as long as we have their Rocky Gordon with us, the patrol won't dare bomb us. They won't kill one of their own men to capture us. *Grab him!*"

The last two words were a shout. Rocky Gordon had chosen to face the gun. But now he knew he had to run. King Judson was right. The patrol would not bomb the outlaws as long as one of their own men was in danger.

He went out across the surface of the asteroid in great kangaroo-like leaps. If he could only put a hundred yards between himself and the outlaws, the patrol ship, blasting down, would be able to smash the bandits. If!

Shouts from Judson grated in his earphones. The outlaws were coming after him, coming fast. He twisted his head to see how close they were. Just as he twisted his head, one of the outlaws, after making a prodigious leap against the weak gravity of the asteroid, landed feet foremost right in the middle of his back.

Gordon went down. Throwing fists right and left, he jerked himself to his feet. There was no point in trying to hit the outlaw on the chin. The heavy helmet protected that and the glassite window was unbreakable. There was not much point in hitting him on the body for the heavy suit absorbed the effect of the blows.

The outlaw didn't hit back. He just grabbed and held on. Before Gordon could shake him loose, the other were on him, Judson included.

"Got you!" Judson gloated. "Your little trap didn't work out as you expected, did it? You forgot that as long as we had you, all the patrol could do was chase us. And we've been chased so long we're experts in getting away."

Gordon groaned. His trap had failed. Instead of catching Judson and his men, all he had done was to get himself caught. And as soon as the outlaws shook off pursuit—no difficult task in the asteroid zone—he knew what they would do to him.

"Drag him back to our ship," King Judson commanded. "Be damned fast about it. One of those patrol ships is going to land any minute. We've got to take off before it lands."

Out of the corner of his eyes, Gordon saw the patrol ship. It was using its rockets as brakes, blasting for a landing. It would reach the surface of the asteroid in minutes. Minutes! If he could only delay the outlaws. If!

HE fought like a fool. Kicking, gouging, throwing his fists. He was trying to gain time. Trying, and failing. The outlaws simply smothered him. Four of them had him. They began to race toward their ship, dragging him with them.

If he only had a gun! If he had a weapon of any kind. But he didn't.

Then he felt the bulge in the pocket of his space suit and hope leaped in his heart. It wasn't a weapon he felt in that pocket. It wasn't a gun. He didn't have a gun. But he had something else. If he could get to it and if it would work! It had to work! It was his only chance!

With a quick lunge, he jerked one arm free. His hand dived into his pocket. His

fingers closed around the ball-like object nestled there.

One of the outlaws, thinking he might possibly have a gun in his pocket, grabbed his arm just as he jerked it free.

"Whatever you got there, drop it!" the outlaw shouted. "I'll break your damned arm, if you don't."

His arm was jerked away in a grip that sent fierce twinges of pain through his body.

"I'm dropping it," he whispered. "Look. I'm dropping it. Look, all of you." His voice rose to a scream in the radio transmitter. *"Look. You damned fools, you haven't got me yet!"*

His yell focused every eye upon him. As he dropped the object he had taken from his pocket, he pulled the firing pin.

It was the magnesium flare. He had used one of the two flares to signal the outlaws in the tractor. He still had the other one. The outlaws had made certain he didn't have a gun but the flare was so much standard equipment for a prospector that they had paid no attention to it.

It burst in a blaze of intolerable brilliance. The flame of an electric arc is dull in comparison to the bright light of a magnesium flare. It is brighter than an oxy-acetelene torch, brighter than the face of the sun. It is so bright that at close range it would completely blind the human eye.

The outlaws looked at it. They instantly realized what it was, realized what Gordon was trying to do. But his yell had focused their attention, if only for a second, on the object he was dropping. Nobody could look at a magnesium flare, even for a second. Before they could jerk their gaze away, before they could cover their helmets with their arms, the intolerable burst of brilliance had flared before their eyes, blinding them.

The flare blinded Gordon too. Agonized voices sounded in his earphones.

"I can't see—

"That damned patrolman has blinded me!

"Shoot the dog. They've got us but we'll get him."

Blindly, the outlaws began shooting. They couldn't see their target. They succeeded only in shooting each other. Gordon threw himself flat on the ground and rolled to one side. He was still rolling when the patrolmen, leaping from the landing ship, came charging on the scene.

MINUTES later, when his eyes had ceased watering enough for him to see dimly, he was aware that the captain was standing before him. The captain was grinning.

"Nice work, Gordon," he was saying. "Damned nice work. You'll get a citation for this."

Off to one side the patrolmen were handcuffing the outlaws together. The outlaw ship hadn't moved. A patrol vessel was circling angrily over it, daring it to leave the ground.

"It wasn't much," said Gordon, blinking the tears out of his eyes. He still couldn't see very well. "We knew approximately where Judson's hideout was located and I knew the golden asteroid would lure him out of hiding. It sure worked."

He was aware that someone else was running toward him. He saw who it was. Red Hatch. Not Red Hatch, a good-for-nothing prospector, but Red Hatch, patrolman.

"Rocky," he was shouting. *"Rocky—"* are you all right?"

"Nice act you put on, pretending to shoot me when you marooned me," Gordon said. "You almost had me believing you were actually a crook."

He turned to King Judson.

"Well, King, we got you all right," he said. "And I don't think you'll be cheating me out of my share of old Parson Vinson's mine."

Judson glared at him.

"I'll get away." he snarled. "And I'll come back. Now that I know where the mine is—"

Rocky Gordon laughed. He laughed until he roared. Until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and his earphones rang with the din.

"What are you laughing at?" said Judson savagely. "Think I won't escape, eh? Think any Earth jail can hold me—"

"It'll hold you," said Gordon, stopping his laughter. "But that isn't what I'm laughing at. It's Parson Vinson's treasure."

"What about it?"

Rocky Gordon whirled the pirate around toward the mine shaft.

"Walk ahead of me," he commanded. "Come on, Red, let's show the King just what's at the bottom of that shaft. It's

been there for a heck of a long time—five thousand years or more. And a good many men have died for Parson Vinson's treasure. It's only right he at least gets to see the gold he would have murdered to get."

The three walked to the shaft, and then down its dark confines. Gordon shone his flash ahead, and after a few hundred yards, the shaft opened into a huge cave, gleaming with stalactites, seeming to flash with a million jewels.

"Is this it?" asked Judson.

"Yes, King, this is it. And especially right over here on the center. Here's the mother-lode of all treasure troves. But Parson Vinson's gold wasn't gold, it was *—radium!"*

"Radium!" King Judson shrank back. "Hey, it's dangerous to be in here. . . ."

Rocky Gordon shoved him ahead.

"Not at all. Just take a walk ahead and look at that 'radium.'"

King Judson advanced slowly, then stared down. Abruptly he cursed.

"Radium?" he yelled. "Why, you damned fools, this isn't radium. it's just common lead."

Rocky Gordon shook his head.

"No, King, you're wrong. It isn't common lead. That's a very special kind of lead. It used to be radium—in Parson Vinson's time—but that was five thousand years ago. And there's a funny thing about radium. It breaks down, and eventually it loses a few electrons. The only difference is that when those electrons are gone, it isn't radium any more. It's lead. So here's the treasure. Still the way Parson Vinson left it. Want to take a load of it along, King?"

"Yeah," grinned Red Hatch. "For extra weight when they hang you. Might make a quicker, neater job of it. And they *are* going to hang you, King. Rocky and I don't want to do this all over again. There aren't any more lost treasures to be found."

AMAZING PROPHECIES

The Mysterious Predictions of Michel Nostradamus

By Joseph J. Millard

OF all the great prophets of all time, none is more often quoted than that mysterious personality, Michel Nostradamus. Not only did he successfully predict the names and dates of events in France, many years into the future, but he also foretold many things concerning other countries. He even, it is believed by many, prophesied great danger to England's empire sometime between 1941 and 1951.

Michel Nostradamus was born in France in 1503 and died in 1566. During those amazing sixty-three years of life, the astrologer and prophet became one of the best known and most sought-after men of all time. His prophecies, which were always published in quatrains in an obscure manner that required careful interpretation, were eagerly studied and followed in households throughout France. Unriddling the odd prophecies of Nostradamus became as popular a hobby as cross-word puzzling in our day.

In all, Nostradamus published over a thousand quatrains, each containing an obscure or exact prophecy. Ever since his death, people the world over have spent their lives unriddling the meanings of these quatrains, yet even today a great many of them remain as unreadable as they were when first written.

A good example of Nostradamus' method of revealing his prophecies may be found in the famous Quatrain 34 of the Ninth Century. (His quatrains were published in books, called Centuries.)

A literal translation of this quatrain reads: "After the return, the husband will be decorated with the cockade. An attack will be made upon the Tuileries by five hundred. A titled traitor will be Narbon, and another Sauce, watcher of his ancestral oil-kegs."

It sounds, as do most of the quatrains like unintelligible nonsense. Yet, in those four lines, the great prophet concealed a history of one of France's greatest upheavals, the French Revolution. Here is the way the quatrain was finally translated into prophecy, and how that prophecy was fulfilled.

THE PROPHECY OF LOUIS XVI

More than two hundred years later, in 1789, occurred the French Revolution. In 1791, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette fled from Paris but were arrested at Varennes and brought back. Thus, the "return of the husband". On June 20th of the next year, a mass demonstration of Jacobins surrounded the Tuileries, invaded the king's privacy and forced onto his head the red cap or cockade of the Jacobins. A month later, a mob of five hundred stormed the Tuileries and seized the king, to end the monarchy of France. What makes the prophecy even more amazing is the fact that in Nostradamus' day, the Tuileries did not exist as a palace for the kings at all. It was not even built until 1564, some years after the prophecy had been published.

But still more unbelievable was the mention of the names Narbon and Sauce. Louis, Count

Narbonne-Lara, was the king's minister of war until discovery of his connection with the anti-royalist, or people's party, caused his abrupt dismissal. So much for the "titled traitor, Narbon."

Strangest of all is the mention of the name "Sauce." For, two hundred years later, an insignificant inn-keeper and seller of oil and tallow was the man who recognized the fleeing king Louis in disguise, brought about his arrest and subsequent death. That inn-keeper was Sauce, the Mayor of Varennes.

But it would take a large book to record all the prophecies of Nostradamus that have been deciphered and found accurate. In no less sensational a manner, he accurately predicted the appearance and characteristics of a long line of French kings preceding the final Louis. He predicted the appearance of Napoleon Bonaparte, of Oliver Cromwell in England and the English Revolution of 1648.

Concerning England, Nostradamus wrote:

"The great empire of England
Will be all powerful for more than three centuries:
Great armies will traverse land and sea,
The Portuguese will not rejoice thereat."

ENGLAND A MIGHTY POWER

At the time that was written, England was but an insignificant island of no political or military importance. Spain and Portugal were then dominant world powers, with Portugal holding most of India. How that prophecy has come true is well known to everyone. But the suggestion that England would lose her power sometime after three centuries is a matter for the nearing future. Three hundred years after the passage of the English Navigation Act in 1651, the real start of England's march to world power, would end the three centuries somewhere around 1951. With conditions as they are in Europe today, many people are regarding Nostradamus' fantastic prophecy with no little alarm.

Nostradamus himself said that, if he so desired, he could give every date in history up to the year 3797—the time which he himself stated was reached by his prophecies. It is only regrettable that we have been unable to fathom so many of his prophecies dealing with our modern times and our own near future. One, however, clearly described the American Revolution, the separation from England and final rise to power of America.

In October, 1999, says Nostradamus, a terrible king will assault and destroy Paris. This king will come from Asia and will possess frightful weapons and, of all things . . . *reindeer!* Yet, even now, certain Asiatic tribes are making strides in the development of reindeer as beasts of burden in Siberia. In 3420, Paris will finally be burned to the ground and destroyed forever.

In the year 7000, predicted the great prophet, the final world catastrophe will occur—a great deluge like that of Bible times and an upset in climatic and geographical conditions that turn the Gobi Desert into a sea.

Of particular interest today is his prediction "In Germany will spring up different sects, approaching nearly a careless paganism. . ." and in another quatrain: "A new sect of Philosophers, despising death, gold, honor, and riches, they will not be confined to the Mountains of Germany, they will have support of followers and press," Other quatrains predict a bloody revolution and downfall of Italy, with the blood of Churchmen flowing like water in the streets and, eventually, the Vatican being moved to some foreign land across the sea.

The man, Nostradamus, was no less fantastic than his unequalled gift of prophecy. Born of Jewish parents, he was trained as a physician and gained fame throughout France for his unbelievable success in halting the deadly plagues that ravaged whole cities. Although a devout Catholic, he nevertheless followed the forbidden books of Black Magic of the ancient races and called into materialization many demons and spirits. Although an acknowledged astrologer, he followed a system of astrological calculation that has remained a mystery to this day.

SOURCE OF HIS POWERS

Nostradamus himself explained his powers with great frankness and clarity. When the Children of Israel fled from Egypt, they took with them the secret documents from the temple. So said Nostradamus, and it is known that later, when the Romans sacked the Temple of Jerusalem, these documents had vanished.

At any rate, the mysterious works of geometry, cosmography and algebra were said to have been handed down through the sons of the Tribe of Issachar until eventually they fell into the hands of Nostradamus. He himself admits having learned his secrets from those books which he later destroyed to protect future mankind. He wrote that when he set fire to these ancient manuscripts, "that flame was more brilliant than ordinary flame, as though a preternatural lightning flash had abruptly illumined the house and threw it into sudden conflagration."

He knew and used the law of gravitation a hundred years before Newton and the law of the ecliptic, later "discovered" by Kepler who was not born until after Nostradamus' death.

But at last death came to this strange man. In one of his own quatrains he had previously written: "Upon returning from a mission, gift of the King, back to place, nothing more will occur, I shall have gone to God; Near ones, friends, brothers of my blood will find me dead, near to the bed and the bench."

On the morning of July 2nd, 1566, friends who came to the house of Nostradamus who had just been granted the title Physician and Counselor in Ordinary to His Majesty, found the great man dead upon his bench, close by his bed. As he had requested, his body was entombed upright in the masonry of a Franciscan Chapel and for many years thereafter, no one would go near the place for they were sure that Nostradamus was not dead but had merely retired to a new place of study.

RETURN of the SPACE HAWK

Slade could hear Gorham at his heels as he ran toward the hangar

by DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

IF Slade Fay played coward, lovely Dana Forester would hate him. If he didn't, Gorham would recognize him—and hang him!

"CHIEF, Chief, q u e e k—I am see something!"

Slade Fay looked up from his paper-littered desk quickly, irritation in his usually bland blue eyes. Looked up at the swarthy, visibly excited little Martian who had breathlessly uttered that frantic sentence as he burst into the mining office.

"D a m n it, Kogo!" Fay snapped. "Haven't I told you never to call me Chief? Haven't you gotten that into your skull yet?" Then, calming somewhat, Fay added: "What's the trouble, been filling yourself up with that planet punch again? Seeing things?"

Kogo shook his round bald head excitedly.

"No, no. I'm n o t drink anyting. Just now, passing right outside mining office, I'm see *Jon Gorham!*"

"Jon Gorham?" Fay was startled. "Not *Federation Inspector Gorham?*" Then, at once, he was standing, running his lean brown hand through tousled straw-colored hair.

Kogo nodded swiftly.

"It is no other I am seeing!"

Fay's lips compressed, his slight, wiry frame went taut. Anxious concern was written in his eyes.

"Did he see you?" he demanded. Then, as an afterthought, Fay added: "That wouldn't make any difference, though. Gorham couldn't possibly remember you." Suddenly: "Where was he coming from?"

"He is come from the direction of landing base. He is go toward village and garrison," Kogo declared.

"Must have just arrived," Fay said half to himself. Then his brown hand clenched and he brought it hard upon his desk. "Damn!" he snapped. "This is a hell of a mess. If Gorham has come here with any suspicions—if he has any idea that he might find me here . . ." Fay broke off suddenly.

"It has been five, six, year since we are arrive here . . ." Kogo began.

"Eight years," Fay cut him off. "We've been here eight years, Kogo. Eight years trying to start things over again, trying to wipe a dirty slate clean, trying to live like decent, God-fearing citizens of space. Eight years that aren't going to be worth a cent on our record if Gorham is able to recognize me."

Kogo paled beneath his swarthy complexion. He grabbed at his throat in a significent gesture.

"Space pirates they are hung. Eet is not civilization that they should hang space pirates. But they do. O, yak, if these

Gorham remembers, eet will be like you say, our record will not mean anyting!"

BUT Fay wasn't listening to the ominous predictions of his little Martian handyman. His blue eyes had narrowed and were fixed on the ceiling as he went over some swift reflections. He was recalling the last time he had encountered Federation Inspector Gorham.

Eight years ago, that had been . . .

Eight years ago, when Slade Fay was known only as the "Space Hawk," known only as the most feared and hated pirate in the outer stratas of space. The Federation Patrols had had a staggering reward planked on the nose of his crimson single-seater space fighter in those days. A reward which few men—including the most dauntless in the Patrols—had dared to go after. For the "Space Hawk" and his pirate squadron had amassed incredible loot in their raids on the outposts of the interplanetary chain.

And eight years ago Slade Fay had been, at twenty-three, the most daring, courageous, and deadly pilot-fighter in space. For his had been a heritage of space banditry. He had been born and raised on an outlaw post in the uncharted reaches of the interplanetary chain. Grown up among freebooters and pirates, finally rising to unquestioned leadership of the most notorious of the space raiding squadrons.

Slade Fay's father had been a space freebooter—a tall, seldom smiling leader of a small brigand band. And as for Fay's mother, since he had never seen her, he presumed she had died shortly after his birth. Fay's first conscious recollection of his childhood had been a bitter, tearful day when a group of hard-fisted freebooters —who had served under his father—came to him and tried to explain, as best they could to a four year old child, that his father had been shot down in a battle with Federation Patrols.

Fay hadn't been able to understand quite well what they meant, but the child did realize that his father had gone, and would never return. And the orphaned waif of space had dug his tiny fists into his blue eyes in an effort to choke back the tears he was ashamed to shed in front of men. Then, perhaps, the future pirate leader "Space Hawk" had been born. The space waif was even nameless at that time, since his father had been known among the pirates only as Big Slade, and the uncouth outlaws referred to him as "son" or "tyke."

Later, after he'd gained leadership, he was still without a name. It was the Federation Patrols who had tacked the title "Hawk" on him, and his pillaging comrades had called him that from that day forward.

But Fay's battle to eventual leadership among the brigands of space had been —like the rest of his youthful existence —a wild, hard, and fierce one. It had taken guts, and brains of a sort, and a reckless daring and sense of timing when it came to putting a space fighting craft through its paces. Fay had been twelve when he'd soloed his first space craft, fourteen, when he went along on his first pirate raid. And bit by bit, he built a reputation among his bandit comrades. A reputation for daring and natural leadership that led him to the eventual day when he hurled his space gauntlet into the startled face of the pirate who was then the burly commander of the brigand forces.

And, according to the unwritten tradition of the freebooters, the hurling of the space gauntlet meant one thing—a challenge for the leadership of the band!

Fay was eighteen on the day he challenged, grim and unsmiling as he took his fighter craft up into the void to meet the burly commander of the pirates in a death-battle for leadership of the freebooters.

The man he downed that day was a veteran, with the heart and savage skill of more than fifteen years behind him, but Fay hadn't bothered to reckon that. The youth knew only one thing, that he was the greatest pilot of them all, and that he would prove it in his inter-brigand death battle.

In a fight that lasted fourteen hours, Fay at last sent the space ship of his opponent hurtling downward through the void—a cinder. And when he stepped out of his craft to face the admiration of the men who were now his to command, his hands were blackened and seared by the flame of his proton guns but his grin was wide and cocky. He had won leadership, and none dared dispute him.

FROM that day on, Fay took command. None but his own comrades knew him by sight. Government and the Federation Patrols could recognize him only

by the masterful manner in which he whipped his crimson ship through a hell-fight in the void. And his supreme command of space-fighter maneuvers marked him as definitely as fingerprints would have marked another man.

But then, eight years ago, there came that time when Federation Inspector Gorham had—with a squadron of fifteen fighters—trapped young Fay and his brigand band on a small outpost near Saturn. There had been fury in the void, that day, as young Fay led his squadron through the trap that Gorham set for them.

In his crimson single-seater—with the ever-present Kogo sandwiched in behind him—Fay had led his band through the blazing hell of Gorham's proton guns. Had led them through, and personally accounted for seven of the Federation's fifteen fighters, while losing only three of his own ships. Gorham and two other Federation space fighters escaped, but the rest of the government patrol were not as fortunate.

And it was only a day after that battle that the "Space Hawk," somehow sickened by the carnage he'd been guilty of, and infinitely weary of the harried existence that was his, decided to abandon his career of blood and pillage.

The Space Hawk's announcement that he was quitting the freebooter's life hadn't been popular with his brigand band. To them he had been a cunning, skillful leader, a daring general. Never in the history of space piracy had freebooters enjoyed the success that they had had under the leadership of the Space Hawk. There was little sentiment among the pirate hordes, but they knew the financial advantage of the Space Hawk's generalship. Scarcely any of them wanted to see him go.

But among those who were pleased by his decision to end his career as pirate chieftan was one Black Bart—a swarthy, black-bearded, thick-muscled Venusian renegade. He had served as one of several sub-lieutenants to the Space Hawk, lacking the daring, and speed, and brains of his slim blond leader, but having no equal in the far vast voids of space for cruelty and blood-lusting savagery.

Under the Space Hawk's constant restraint and vigilance, Black Bart's bestial wildness had been kept in check, for, like the others, he held fear and respect for the dashing young brigand leader. And it was a secret order, passed among his most trusted men, that the Space Hawk left with his brigands—"Keep Black Bart from leadership!"

The slim young pirate commander felt certain that Black Bart would not take over as his successor if the rules of the brigand bands were followed in choosing a leader to replace the Space Hawk. There were other lieutenants of equal skill in space fighting to Black Bart, and the retiring young commander felt assured that one of these would best the beetle-browed thug in the tournament-to-death for leadership of the freebooters.

The Space Hawk was not five days' travel from his outlaw planet when word came to him that, somehow, Black Bart had wrested supremacy of the brigand bands from the other lieutenants and was now free to rage the void as an unchecked, untamed menace.

But with Kogo, and an unobstrusive, unarmed space ship, plus some of the fortune he had amassed, young Fay was already headed directly for Earth—where there wasn't a chance of his being identified—to make arrangements for a fresh start on one of the interplanetary mining fields.

He thought of going back to his outlaw planet just long enough to unseat Black Bart from his new leadership, but then he shrugged inwardly and gave up the idea, realizing that he could never start afresh if he was going to have to constantly police his old companions.

ARRIVING on Earth he'd taken the name "Slade Fay," and under that name, went on to Planetoid Ninety, buying enough acreage to set up a radium drilling corporation. Kogo was the only one aware of his past existence, and there was scant risk of his ever being identified as the "Hawk." He'd seen to that, by the clothes he chose, and the ignorance he protested in connection with piloting a space ship. No one would ever think of looking for a quiet, blond, unobtrusive young man industriously operating a very legitimate business—not if they sought the "Space Hawk!"

For the "Space Hawk" had vanished eight years ago . . .

Slade Fay realized this, as he frowned tensely at the ceiling. He was safe here. The life he'd been living had been right, and decent, and would continue to be. He'd

severed connections forever with the bloody past he'd been born to. He had a future ahead of him. A prospering business, and even a girl, here on Planetoid Ninety, whom he hoped one day to marry.

"But what is Gorham doing here?" Fay said aloud. And Kogo, still breathing in heavy excitement, shook his head unknowingly.

"Eight year long time," Kogo suggested. "Maybe Gorham no know you here. Gorham no have idea what you look like. None have any idea about *that*. They never saw you then. So they don't know you now." To Kogo, this all seemed simple, masterful logic, and he grinned happily as he concluded his speech.

But Fay shook his head.

"It's not as easy as that, Kogo. If any of our old cutthroat pals were captured, there's a possibility that one of them might betray me, describe me sufficiently enough for the Federation Patrols to know what sort of a chap to look for. That's the risk we've been running all these eight years."

"Eight year long time," Kogo repeated stubbornly. "If Gorham know, then why do Gorham not come quick and grab us for hanging party?"

Fay relaxed somewhat at this.

"You've got something there," he acknowledged. "We'll have to play it cozy and see what happens. If Gorham isn't here on a tip, we're safe. Keep your nail-bitten fingers crossed, Kogo."

"Me cross," said the swarthy Martian obediently. "Me like it these eight year. So restful, so good."

Fay smiled reflectively. "Yes, these eight years have been pleasant, Kogo. A lot different from the life we knew before then, eh?"

Kogo grinned. "Space pirating plenty damned exciting, but too much on the move all time. You been good influence on Kogo, Boss. Give Kogo plenty luck."

"Or," Fay amended, "it might be the other way around. When I saved your neck from a hanging party that day you stumbled into our outlaw base twelve years ago, I was doing myself a better turn than I did for you. Had nothing but good luck ever since then."

Kogo touched his throat in uncomfortable recollection.

"That right, plenty right, Boss. But here on Ninety was best luck Kogo ever have. Old outlaw life was get too fast for Kogo near the end. It seem funny, though, how you look and act these eight year, Boss. You not like outlaw a bit."

Fay mentally agreed to this. The role that he had forced himself to enact was the direct opposite of his more youthful characteristic as a leader of space brigands. Ever since his arrival on Planetoid Ninety, he had seen to it that his attitude was consistently one of outward calm, constant unassuming mildness. Even the tunics he wore were selected with an eye toward totally altering his personal appearance. They were all plainly and conservatively tailored—so unobtrusive as to be a perfect background for the mild-mannered young engineer he portrayed.

Not that Fay minded this role. The very genuineness of his effort to live for the rest of his life as a conservative citizen of society prevented him from feeling restrained by his chosen role. And, too, there *was* a pleasant feeling of reward gained from this serene, secure existence—a sort of restful comfortable calm. He had learned to enjoy things not necessarily exciting. He had learned to live as a civilized human being, getting the utmost joy out of the simple, friendly things of life, rather than as the sensation-seeking pillager that he once was.

THIS new life had come to mean more to Fay than he ever imagined it could. It gave him a sense of honor, usefulness, decency, and made the very mundane day-to-day existence of working and living in harmony with the right half of the world something fine and exciting in itself.

"It has been fine," Fay concluded. And the thought made him instantly snap his fingers at the recollection of the finest thing about it—one petite, brunette, and lovely Dana Forester.

"Get me the Forester residence on the televizor," Fay ordered Kogo. "We'll forget Gorham until we know more what's up."

"You got girl on brain much often," Kogo observed, shuffling to the televizor board to make the connection. "Don't let girl make for you to forget Gorham."

Fay frowned thoughtfully. This was an angle he hadn't considered. If Gorham were really here in search of him, Fay realized, the hasty exit he'd have to make would mean more than leaving an eight year start on a new life. It would mean

more than leaving the prosperous mining game he'd built here on Planetoid Ninety. It would mean leaving the symbol, the essence, of everything fine he'd found in this new existence. It would mean leaving Dana Forester—the girl he loved—forever.

His lean young face was slightly strained, therefore, when he stepped before the glowing televizor board a moment later. Appearing against the orange luminance of the televizor screen was the face of Dana Forester. An oval face, framed by raven hair and centered by a pert little nose that wrinkled above an impish smile.

"Hello, Slade," Dana's voice was elfin, with the slightest husky undertone. "I was just going to get you. Our little old forsaken outpost here has been graced by a visitor, Garrison Inspector Gorham. He'll be here for several days, as Dad's guest, so I've cooked up a sort of welcome celebration for him this evening. Guess who's invited!"

Fay let out a deep sigh of relief. That was it. Gorham was here to inspect the garrison on Ninety. Then, suddenly he remembered that his face was visible to Dana. He forced a grin.

"You mean me?" he said. "Me, invited to the Forester mansion?"

Dana laughed.

"None other. And incidentally, what's eating you, Slade? You looked as worried as a Martian grizzly when you flashed on."

Fay sidestepped this.

"Am I worried now?"

Dana shook her head, eyes laughing.

"Nope. But I want you to be at the house by no later than eight. I'm saving the first dance for you. Remember now."

"It's a date, Dana." Fay's forced grin was still there. "See you then, space angel."

Kogo was watching him, as Fay turned from the televizor screen. Watching him with anxious button eyes. He shook his head sadly.

"What's wrong now?" Fay demanded.

The little Martian man-Friday sighed.

"Is no good. Is not smart. You should staying away from Forester place. Should staying away from Inspector Gorham. No take chance."

Fay grinned assurance he didn't quite feel.

"It's okay, Kogo. Gorham is a Garrison Inspector now. He's just making a routine call on the outpost of Ninety."

Kogo shook his head stubbornly.

"Kogo have things ready so we get out queek, should need to do so sudden maybe."

"We won't have to leave in a hurry," Fay grinned. "But if you insist on warming up a space ship all right, then go right ahead."

"Kogo insist. Kogo go ahead," the round headed little Martian declared. Then, shaking his head from side to side, he left. Fay watched the door close after Kogo. For a moment his eyes narrowed in silent speculation and his jaw went hard.

"Gorham," Fay muttered. "Whatever you're up to, I can bluff my hand as well as you can."

Then he stepped back behind his desk, sat down, and began leafing through the papers before him. The Space Hawk had disappeared once again, and now he was Slade Fay, quiet, thorough young radium mining engineer. A very different person . . .

AT seven o'clock that evening, Slade Fay left his small, comfortable quarters on the edge of the settlement compound, and strolled along the narrow main street of the little planetoid. Planetoid Ninety, though but an outpost of the radium mining chains in the Interplanetary Open Territories, was large enough to boast four capacity-working radium mines, a small settlement which housed earth dwellers residing there, and an outpost military garrison consisting of five Space Patrol Officers and seven space fighting ships.

Of the four radium mines, Slade operated the smallest, and Martin Forester—Dana's father—owned the largest. The other two mines were operated on a co-operative basis by seven or eight radium engineers settled on the planetoid. The Space Patrol garrison was an important—though very seldom called upon—part of the planetoid operations. It was the duty of the Patrol to protect Planetoid Ninety and other outlying radium bases from surprise attack by marauding space freebooters—pirates of the brand Fay had once led.

In the eight years that Slade Fay had been on Planetoid Ninety, raids had been conspicuous by their absence. But then, after the mysterious disappearance of the Space Hawk from the pirate squadrons, the freebooters had apparently confined their raids to only the farthest outlying mining posts. Although attacks on these

other and less protected bases had been frequent during those eight years, their fury and success had diminished somewhat. Black Bart hadn't proved to be the brigand leader that the Space Hawk had been—not as daring, not as brilliant, at any rate.

But Slade wasn't thinking of the garrison in respect to possible raids from his former brigand comrades. He thought, rather, of Gorham's purpose in visiting Planetoid Ninety. It was quite possible, of course, that Gorham—now evidently promoted to the post of Garrison Inspector—had a legitimate and routine purpose in his visit here. But there could be more to it than that. There could be complications hinging on the intense dislike which Fay and Space Patrol Leader Stacy Leed felt for one another. Leed was Garrison Commander here on Ninety. And the hatred that had grown between Fay and Leed could be traced to the fact that they both loved Dana Forester.

Leed was tall, dark-haired, handsome. But he had had a blustering braggadocio—an affected devil-may-care attitude—about him which had made Fay dislike him instantly.

Space Patrol Leader Stacy Leed wore his Federation uniform like some people would wear a Federation Medal of Merit. His constant attitude toward Fay was one of tolerant amusement. In the year that Dana Forester had been here with her father, Leed had done all that he could to intimate that Slade Fay was a drab doormat, an insipid drudge to whom the very thought of combat in space was terrifying.

This, in view of the pose Fay had been forced to adopt, grew gradually more and more irritating. And it hadn't helped him much in his courtship of Dana. The girl had a strong affection for them both, Fay knew. But as yet, her attentions were equally divided.

In the last month, however, there had been more than a hint of a change in Stacy Leed's manner toward Fay. There had been no increase in cordiality, of course, but something closer to a growing suspicion on the part of Leed toward Fay.

Fay had told himself that he was just imagining this. He told himself that Leed could never learn anything that might lead him to probe into Fay's past. However, Garrison Inspector Gorham was here. And he might very well have been summoned by Leed, perhaps on a hunch.

BUT, fishing into his pocket for a cigarette, Fay pushed these suspicions from his mind and forced himself to assume his usually bland and unexcited manner. He adjusted the tunic coat of the quiet unassuming costume he had chosen for the evening, and after lighting his cigarette, went to the additional precaution of donning the spectacles he had affected during his eight years on Ninety.

The street was quiet and deserted, like most space settlement thoroughfares after dark, and Fay moved along unhurriedly toward the large residence of Martin Forester which lay at the other end of the compound.

When he reached the Forester residence, Fay could see, from the lights in the place, that Dana's welcoming celebration for Gorham was already well under way. Dana met Fay at the door of the wide, sprawling duraloid dwelling. She was laughing; she had a glass in her hand; and she was prettier than Fay had ever seen her before.

Stacy Leed, uniform resplendent and not missing a trick where his rival was concerned, had followed Dana to the door and now stood directly behind her.

"You're late," Dana said in mock accusation. "I'll bet you hate to tear yourself away from those charts of yours."

Fay smiled. But his eyes, which flicked momentarily to Leed, weren't smiling. He knew that, in less than five minutes, he would come face-to-face with Gorham. And then and only then would he know how the land lay.

Was there a glitter of expectation, of malice, in Leed's eyes when he added:

"Absolutely, Fay. We've all been waiting for your arrival. You have to meet our guest, y'know."

Fay let it go at that, and forced himself to smile and say something banal in reply. Then, with Dana at his side, he was moving through the spacious Forester living room where practically all of the Earth colonists of Ninety were gathered.

Dana's small, cool hand found Fay's once as they moved through the guests, giving it a reassuring squeeze. Fay could hear Leed, still with them, say:

"You'll enjoy meeting Gorham, old man. Not every day a rugged industrialist like yourself can meet a first-class fighting man."

Fay felt his cheeks grow hot under the scornful inference of Leed's words. But

he held himself in check and forced another one of those increasingly difficult smiles.

At the end of the room, standing beside the blocky form of old Martin Forester—was Gorham!

Fay had a wild impulse to turn, to lose himself in the crowd before Gorham saw him. But then he steadied himself, praying inwardly that the sudden fear he'd felt hadn't been noticed by Dana or Stacy Leed. Apparently it hadn't for Leed was saying something to Dana and neither of them had been looking at him in that instant.

"There's Garrison Inspector Gorham," Dana said, "standing beside Dad. Come on, Slade, I want you to meet him."

Fay smiled and nodded.

"Might as well. I don't want to offend your guest of honor."

Stacy Leed was silent. But he stood beside them when Dana, holding lightly to Fay's arm, introduced Gorham.

"This is Slade Fay, Inspector. And of course you know Stacy Leed, Inspector."

AS Fay grabbed Gorham's outstretched hand, his eyes met and held with those of the gray-haired, uniformed garrison inspector. Gorham had been eight years younger the last time Fay had glimpsed his face. And that glimpse had been gotten while riding the tail of Gorham's rocket fighter in an effort to send him downward through space as a blazing cinder. Yes, Gorham had been younger then, and Fay had seen his face, coolly turned to look back at him, behind the glass turret of a space helmet.

But Fay remembered, even to the expression in Gorham's slate gray eyes, to the cool quirk of amusement that twitched the corners of that straight mouth beneath the neatly trimmed gray moustache. Fay remembered with surprising vividness and wondered if in those cool gray eyes there wasn't a hint of similar recollection.

"Glad to know you, Fay," was all that Gorham said, however. "I'll be seeing more of you, I hope. Intend to be around Ninety for several days, you know."

Then, somehow, Fay managed to steer Dana away, leaving Stacy Leed with Gorham and Martin Forester. Music had started, and it was with vast relief that Fay took Dana in his arms and moved onto the small circle that had been cleared for dancing.

He kept Dana between himself and Gorham's group, watching as best he could without attracting suspicion, if there was anything passing between Gorham and Stacy. But the trio of Stacy Leed, Gorham and Martin Forester didn't seem to be noticing them, and for the first time since Kogo's announcement of that afternoon, Fay felt as though the ground beneath him were more secure.

"I don't know, Slade," Dana was saying, "what seems to be wrong with you, but you do seem preoccupied about something or other. Has anything gone wrong at the mines?"

"Perhaps I'm getting senile, business crazy," Fay grinned disarmingly. "But, for the life of me, I swear I haven't been deliberately worrying about anything." Which, he realized as the music stopped, was at least half the truth.

A hubbub of conversation started, then, drowning out Dana's reply. And in the next moment, just as the music started, Stacy Leed stood before them.

"Mind?" he asked, voice directed at Dana, eyes at Fay.

Fay caught Dana's glance, was about to speak, but Leed had already encircled her waist with his arm. Fay shrugged, and stepped back off the dance floor.

And at that moment someone began pounding loudly, insistently, on the door of the Forester residence. People looked up, but the music continued. It was old Martin Forester, followed by Gorham and several others, who moved swiftly across the room toward the insistent pounding.

The door was visible to all in the room, and when Martin Forester opened it, Fay was startled to see an exciteded wire-phone orderly from the Space Patrol garrison moving excitedly into the room and talking rapidly to Gorham.

Gorham's jaw set, and Fay could see the look of shocked surprise register on Martin Forester's features at the fellow's words. Gorham half-turned, facing the section of the room where the dancers were.

"Space Patrol Leader Leed," he shouted, "come here!"

Fay saw Leed frown, then leave Dana, hurrying through the crowded room, acutely conscious of his bedecked uniform. Then, Dana, seeing Fay, came hurriedly over to him.

"What's happened, Slade?" There was

anxious concern in Dana's voice.

Fay shook his head.

"I don't know." He grabbed Dana's arm. "Come on, let's find out. Something serious, obviously." A moment later, and they were part of the circle around Gorham, the garrison wire-phone orderly, Leed, and Martin Forester.

It was Gorham who held up his hand, calming the clamor and questions from those in the room.

"Take it easy," he said. "Nothing terribly serious. Nothing to affect any of you immediately, at any rate. One of your neighboring planetoids—number Eighty-Seven, to be exact—has been attacked by Black Bart's pirate squadron. The defenses of Eighty-Seven need what help we can send them."

IT was Leed who spoke now.

"We've four ships, and we can spare them all. We've men enough to man them. There'll be time to arrive at Eighty-Seven before Black Bart's crew can wreak any havoc."

Fay started to speak, then he saw the admiration that flashed into Dana's eyes at Leed's last words. But it wasn't because of that that he checked himself. It was because Black Bart, the brigand who'd taken over the freebooters after he'd left eight years before, Black Bart, who was at this very moment carrying out precisely the same clever mode of attack that he, Slade Fay—alias the Space Hawk—had devised in many of the raids he'd conducted in his freebooting days. For Fay was morally certain, deadly certain, that Black Bart was creating a disturbance over Planetoid Eighty-Seven merely to draw Planetoid Ninety's defense forces away.

It was sickeningly simple. Once Leed and his small squadron left for Eighty-Seven, once Planetoid Ninety was left unprotected, a squadron of Black Bart's raiders would swoop down on the defenseless outpost, collect its plunder, and be off before Leed's forces could return.

Fay was certain of this because he, himself, had devised the scheme almost ten years ago. And now Black Bart was resurrecting it again. And from Leed's announcement, and from the agreement he saw on Gorham's face, Black Bart was employing the device successfully!

Black Bart didn't concern himself merely with plunder. Bart was ruthless, and blood-lusting. His depredations had often caused arguments between Fay and himself in the old days. Fay had been able to hold him down, then. But there would be no rein over the huge brigand's passion for carnage this time.

Fay bit deep into his lower lip, his hands unconsciously clenching into fists at his side. He had to stop this scheme of Leed and Gorham. Had to stop it before it was too late. There was no real danger for the inhabitants of Planetoid Eighty-Seven, Fay knew. There was no real danger because—according to the strategy of Black Bart's plan—the force harassing Eighty-Seven was ridiculously small, dummied out to appear as being of great strength. According to Black Bart's plan, the really deadly squadron of raiders was that which was probably right now skulking within electragun distance of Planetoid Ninety.

"Wait a minute!" Fay heard his own voice speaking before he was conscious that he'd uttered the words. There was a swift silence of wondering surprise, and Fay could feel everyone's eyes fixed questioningly on him.

"It's stupid, and needless, for us to send our Patrol to the defense of Planetoid Eighty-Seven. Utterly stupid. There's no real danger of Eighty-Seven being actually looted. It's a trap, a lure, on the part of Black Bart to draw us away from the essential defense of our own base." Fay was conscious of the incredulous expressions on the faces around him, of the scorn in Leed's eyes.

"And what," Stacy Leed said acidly, "do you pretend to know about space patrol maneuvers, or space fighting, for that matter? I think we can do without your sage advice, Fay." He paused. "Your fear of a raid on your mining deposits can be appreciated," his sarcasm was obvious now, "but there are women and children on Eighty-Seven whose lives are more important than financial interests. Or," he added venomously, "the interests of your own hide."

THE muscles in the corner of Fay's jaw hardened, and he started a hot reply, but Stacy Leed was continuing mercilessly, squeezing every last drop out of this situation which allowed him to make Fay appear craven in the eyes of Dana Forester.

"If less of your type of meddling citizenry were around to run at the mouth,"

Leed said caustically, "we of the Space Patrol would find our job easier. You drab, mousey devils are always the kind to figure you know everyone else's business as well as you know your own. Well, my business happens to be a tough one, Fay, one which I'm sure you and your ilk wouldn't like very well. It's a business that takes stuff known as courage, not to mention a little brains. But of course," and Leed's voice grew even more caustic, "I can't blame you for not knowing much about courage. After all, a man who is perfectly willing to risk the lives of women and children on another planet, in order to keep his own hide intact, can't be expected to know anything about courage—or decency!"

Fay stepped forward, eyes blazing, fists clenched. But Gorham, at that moment, stepped between Fay and Leed.

"Easy, Fay," Gorham said quietly, "that won't help anything." Then, to Leed: "A little less rancor would be a better attitude, Patrol Leader. Fay, here, just advanced a reason for another course of action. That shouldn't bring down a tirade."

But Leed, carefully watching Dana's strained face, suddenly smiled. He could afford to be magnanimous now that his below-the-belt punches had irrepairably damaged his rival.

"Perhaps you're right, Inspector. Fay's bland disregard of military tactics can probably be excused through his ignorance of them. I apologize for that part of it, although I can hardly excuse the gentleman's lack of concern for the women and children on Eighty-Seven."

Fay fought to keep control of himself while he said:

"There are women and children on Planetoid Ninety, Leed, remember that. I'm only trying to tell you that I think you're acting rashly, heedlessly, and leaving this planetoid wide open to attack through your stupidity!"

Stacy Leed's face went dark.

"If you weren't the weakling that you are, and if I hadn't urgent business elsewhere, I'd take time off and remove my uniform long enough to teach you an unpleasant lesson!"

Gorham broke in again, before Fay could reply.

"Patrol Leader, enough of his squabbling! Need I remind you that, no matter what course of action you choose, there is a decision to be made? That decision is the important matter at hand!"

"You're right, Inspector," Leed said, blandly smiling again, "this is no time for me to be swatting flys."

Fay felt the blood pounding to his temples. Someone in the crowd laughed unpleasantly. The only face on which there was not written contemptuous derision was that of Gorham, who seemed to be measuring Fay with that coolly appraising gaze of his. Fay wanted to blaze forth with the truth, wanted to tell them why he knew what he did, and why his information was positive. And then his eye caught Dana's, and the look she gave him was unbelieving, disappointed, hurt.

He felt a sudden growing surge of rage, and his jaw clamped shut. He knew that to them, to everyone present, he was but a bespectacled, slender blonde with an utterly unheroic status. He'd played his self-adopted role too well during his eight years on Ninety to convince them that he was anything but what he had wanted them to believe he was.

And a revelation of the truth would shatter his own life, his own hopes and ambitions, utterly, completely; would end it on a gallows. So Slade Fay, shoulders suddenly slumping, held his tongue.

GORHAM suddenly spoke.

"Perhaps there's not as much nonsense in what Fay says as you'd like to believe, Leed. Consider his reasoning first."

There was a murmer through the crowd. Although Gorham was a higher ranking Federation Officer than Leed, he was merely on an inspection tour, and in that capacity had no command over any individual base. All he could do in the present situation was what he was doing at the moment, serving as advisor. The final command of Ninety's garrison lay in the hands of Leed. But the handsome, dark-haired young Space Patrol leader was inflamed by the reception his first words had gotten from the crowd. Obviously, now, his most desirable course of action was the immediate rocketing of his squadron to the aid of Eighty-Seven. It was reckless, courageous, daring—a fine gesture for a gallant young officer. He shook his head.

"I'm afraid there's only one course open to us, Inspector Gorham. We'll go to the immediate aid of Eighty-Seven."

The swelling noise of approval from the

crowd, and the look in Dana Forester's eyes was reward enough for Stacy Leed. Turning dramatically, he walked to the door. His fellow officers had left their groups, and were now beside him.

Fay, watching all this, realized sickly that Dana had left his side, and was saying goodbye to Stacy, while old Martin Forester, giving Fay one swift glance of scorn, was pumping the hands of the other officers beside Leed.

As for Gorham, he fished calmly into his pocket, found a cigarette and lighted it. The expresison on his face hadn't changed. His eyes were on Fay, questioning, and, for an instant, Fay forgot his immediate problem long enough to wonder how much Gorham really knew.

There were few among those who had been gathered at the Forester residence who didn't follow the Space Patrol down to the landing base to witness the take-off of the squadron.

Stacy Leed, preparing his Flight Patrol for the take-off, was like an overly obnoxious athlete playing to a grandstand. And while he checked over the fighting gear on his ships and mapped out orders for his men, he swaggered back and forth with braggadocio that would have done credit to an actor. And what made matters worse for Fay, was the fact that it was Dana Forester who said the last goodbye to Stacy Leed when the patrol leader climbed into his space fighter.

It was but five hundred yards from the space landing platforms to the squadron hangers, and as the five space-fighting ships rocketed from the landing platforms out into the void, Slade Fay anxiously paced back and forth before the hangers, smoking one cigarette after another.

"I should have stopped them," he muttered savagely. "If I'm right, and I'm dead certain that I am, Black Bart's squadron will be done on us inside of an hour." And then he cursed himself miserably for not having made a stand of it, not having declared himself at any cost.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder, and Fay wheeled, startled, to face Gorham. He was unsmiling, still with that questioning expression on his face.

"I'm afraid our young Space Patrol leader is somewhat hot-headed," Gorham said dryly. "I might have tried harder to override his judgment, but I knew it wouldn't work." Then, casually, he added, "For a mining promoter you seem to have some advanced ideas about space battle tactics, especially from Black Bart's viewpoint."

"What do you mean by that?" Fay's voice was edged, tense from the strain he felt.

"Just what I said," Gorham replied "You know, I have the darndest feeling of having met you somewhere before, Fay. Although, to be utterly frank, I can't remember where."

Fay felt his heart hammer hard against his ribs. Gorham *was* suspicious, then. But still, with matters as they were, he could never prove enough even to put Fay on trial against a gallows sentence. Fay bit his underlip before replying.

"Perhaps you have. I've been around."

THE last of Leed's squadron had left, now, and the crowd was moving toward the hangars. Some collected around the wire-phone shack, where the excited orderly sat beside a phone-avisor, getting bulletins from Planetoid Eighty-Seven, and relaying to them the information that the rescue ships were on the way.

Fay, keeping away from the crowds, was pacing back and forth with increasing desperation, lighting one cigarette after another. Gorham had left him to go over to the wire-phone shack, and Fay could see Dana over there also. Once she turned, and he was certain that she saw him. But she made no move to come toward him. Fay clinched his fists angrily at the agonizing thought of what might happen to Dana should Black Bart and his squadron swoop down upon them.

And then, after perhaps an hour had passed, there was the sudden deafening detonation of rocket exhausts, and a black, single-seater space ship drove screaming down over the wire-phone shack, proton cannons blasting.

There was a horrible bursting of orange flame, and the shack exploded from the blast of the guns. Some of the men and women who had been grouped around the shack screamed wildly, and Fay knew that the raider's guns had deliberately included them in his range.

Black Bart's squadron was sweeping down from the inky void above them. Was sweeping down, and had already destroyed Planetoid Ninety's only chance of communicating with Leed's departing patrol.

They were trapped, helplessly trapped, just as Fay had feared they would be!

Other space fighters—also single seaters—were swooping down, loosing the terrible orange flame of their proton guns on the milling crowds, driving everyone to shelter. This, too, was part of the technique as Fay knew it. Once the inhabitants of an outpost were driven to shelter, the raiders could land unmolested.

But Fay had ground out a cigarette savagely beneath his heel, his jaw gone hard with sudden determination. He raced down to the door of the hanger at the bottom of the hill, pulling it open frantically. There, in the darkness inside, was a single-seater Space Patrol ship.

He shouted to several men running past the hangar, and with their help he was soon rolling it out onto the landing platform runway. As he was hastily checking the rocket discharge indicators, a hand grabbed his shoulder, spinning him around. Gorham faced him. Gorham, with his temple bloody against his gray hair, his face no longer calm.

"What in the devil do you intend to attempt?" Gorham demanded.

"What in the hell does it look like?" Fay snapped back. "I'm going up there, into the void, and not to sell radium deposits. Do I make myself clear?"

Gorham looked wordlessly at Fay, that same measuring gleam in his eyes. His jaw set grimly.

"This is fighting equipment, Fay, and it takes a good man to use it."

"Obviously," Fay snapped. "I know what I'm doing!"

Gorham stood there, regarding Fay silently, a contemplative look on his face. Then he turned quickly on his heel, barking one sentence over his shoulder.

"There's another one of these, so roll it out!" was all the Inspector said.

While they were rolling out the remaining Space Patrol ship for Gorham, he turned to Fay.

"I've got a hunch where I saw you before, and when," he said tersely. "Maybe I'm right, perhaps I'm wrong. But you don't look like a mining engineer when you're checking instrument board indicators!"

Fay looked up but once.

"Perhaps you're right," he said. And even as Gorham trotted over to the other space fighter, Fay felt the tightening of a noose around his neck. Once up in space, once working his proton cannons, Gorham would have enough damning evidence against him to send him to hell for eternity.

SOMEONE handed him a helmet and space gear.

His hesitation before climbing into his space fighter was only momentary, and was dispelled at the thought of Dana in the hands of the stinking devil who was Black Bart. Then he was behind the controls. Behind the controls for the first time in eight years; his hands caressing the familiar trigger-end of proton cannons once more.

"Chief, queek. Make it for me room!"

Fay looked up, startled, to see the round head of Kogo poking into the cabin. Kogo was clad in space gear.

"You know who's up there, Kogo?" Fay demanded.

"Pirates, Black Bart," Kogo said grinning delightedly. "They try to bother decent citizens like you, me. We fix 'em, eh, Chief?"

"You can stay out, Kogo," Fay said, "and avoid the noose. We'll be tagged properly after this performance if we come back."

"Kogo got strong neck," was all the little Martian said. And Fay felt a sudden lump in his throat as he answered:

"Climb in, then!"

Black Bart's raiders had tried to prevent their taking off, but somehow Fay's and Gorham's fighters were rocketing off into space unmolested. Excellent maneuvering on the part of both of them had enabled them to avoid the electraguns and proton cannons of Black Bart's raiders as they climbed voidward.

Then they were in the thick of a unit squadron of Black Bart's ships. Two ships were above Fay, diving down, and two more were beneath him, rocketing upward. When each found range, they unleashed their forward proton cannons. The orange puffs of flame merely scorched Fay's tiny fighter, however.

Kogo gulped.

"Pretty damn close, Chief!"

And then Fay's fingers pressed the triggers of his front guns at precisely the right second. One of the two ships above him burst into an orange puff of smoke and blazed downward. Blazed downward, and straight into the upcoming pirate ship be-

neath Fay's fighter. The two met with a horrible wrenching of burning metal, and together tumbled downward.

"Chalk two right off," Kogo chattered happily.

The other two space ships that had been harrying Fay zoomed suddenly sideward, getting hastily out of range. Fay had time to take a sideward glance to his right, where he saw Gorham's ship hemmed in by three of the brigand squadron. One of the three brigand ships was totally black, an orange streak slashed down its side, and Fay's heart did a sudden side-slip as he recognized the personal insignia of Black Bart. Diving at a screaming right angle, Fay swept down on the group harassing Gorham's ship.

He came up unnoticed and behind the tail of a pirate fighter who was at that instant angling in broadside to Gorham's space craft. It was short work, and the poor devil was plummeting downward after three electragun bursts from Fay's side mounts.

"Chalk three," Kogo gurgled happily.

AND then, side by side with Gorham's ship, Fay climbed out of immediate range of the six remaining brigand ships. He connected his voice panel with Gorham's for the first time.

"Three down," he shouted. "How many did you manage to get?"

"Same," Gorham's voice came back through the instrument board receiver. "That gives us six out of eleven."

"Black Bart is still circulating," Fay cut in. "He's mine, don't forget."

"Okay, *Fay,*" there was irony or sarcasm in Gorhams voice, Fay couldn't tell which. But behind either there was admiration. The admiration of one gladiator for another. But Fay didn't give a damn about Gorham and the noose he held ready. Nothing mattered now but this immediate battle. It had always been that way with the Space Hawk.

And now, dropping the nose of his single-seater, he rocketed into a screaming grav dive that pushed him back against his seat until his ears were ringing and his nostrils ran crimson. Beneath the trigger sights of his proton gun was the black fighter ship of Black Bart.

But the brigand leader had seen his dive, and now rolled over and out of range. But Fay, his reflexes acting with the precision of eight years ago, kept hard on his tail. Now he opened with his proton cannons. But Black Bart still was out of range.

Then, from out of nowhere, there were two brigand ships on his own tail, and Fay could feel their electraguns scorching close to his cockpit. Suddenly, the chatter of their electraguns ceased, and Fay took one look over his shoulder to see Gorham's ship zooming upward from the kill. Two blazing space ships dropped swiftly downward as a result of Gorham's deadly marksmanship.

Fay switched on his voice panel again.

"Gorham?" he shouted.

Gorham's voice came back to him.

"What is it?"

"This is mine from now on—you promised, don't forget." Fay answered. "Get in position to keep the remainder away from me while I take care of Black Bart!"

"It's as good as done," Gorham's voice answered. "Good luck and go to it!"

Fay made an adjustment on his voice panel box, an adjustment that would put him on the wave band of the pirate craft. Then he was talking, clearly, forcefully.

"Black Bart," Fay called. "Black Bart!"

There was an answering, inaudible static, and Fay knew that the brigand chieftan had picked up his call.

"Black Bart," Fay repeated, knowing that the remaining pirate craft all could hear him, "this is the gauntlet, Bart, the challenge!"

And then Fay grinned grimly, for he knew that the pirate commander, as well as the freebooters in the remaining outlaw craft, all had heard the challenge, and all knew that someone who was once of their kind was demanding a death-duel according to the unwritten law of their kind.

"It's the gauntlet," Fay repeated, "thrown from the ship on your tail. Level out, you bloodthirsty scoundrel, and prepare to battle. I'll ride my ship free and give you time to set yourself!"

The challenge was heard, that much was obvious now. And that it was accepted was also apparent, as Fay saw Black Bart's black, orange-slashed ship suddenly level off and start in a wide arc that would bring it around facing Fay's craft. Fay, too, pulled the nose of his ship up into a half-stall, and then back into line with the black, orange-striped ship of his adversary.

Kogo was babbling excitedly, now.

"Oh, yak, yak, yak, these make great

excitement for me. We blaze Black Bart, eh Chief?"

Fay's jaw was grim.

"I hope so, Kogo. I hope this makes excitement instead of a shroud." He was thinking of the eight years rust that was his disadvantage in the battle to come. It hadn't shown yet. Indeed, his tactical maneuvering, and reflex timing seemed better than it had ever been.

But he might have been riding on a lot of luck until now. And too, Black Bart had been fighting in space during the years Fay had been inactive, and Fay wasn't certain how great the burly brigand's skill now was. He was certain, however, that this Black Bart would be far superior in space combat compared to the Black Bart of eight years ago. The inevitable laws of time and experience guaranteed that much.

But the challenge had been hurled. The black space fighter had squared off for a combat to the death!

MENTALLY, Fay was running through countless maneuvers he had used in his space fighting days. Maneuvers based on skill and cunning, made to draw an enemy into a futile defense of his weakest points. Fay had always planned his tactics—like a superior chess player —three or four moves in advance.

But first he would have to test Black Bart, size him up, determine the flaws in the brigand's tactical armor. Fay hauled on his trottle, giving his tiny space fighter full rockets, and blasted into a steep climb. From his visor board, he could see that Bart's black ship was following him upward, unwilling to be outclimbed.

In the middle of his climb, Fay snapped his controls hard to one side. The swiftness, and unexpectedness of the move pulled him close to—but not within range of—the black, orange-slashed belly of the enemy space craft.

The move worried Black Bart. This was instantly apparent by the sudden leveling off of the ebon craft. And Fay took instant and cunning advantage of this by carrying his climb slightly higher and leveling off above his adversary's craft!

Fay was above him now, the first step in his maneuver being successfully completed. Looking quickly at his visor board, Fay saw Black Bart's craft rocketing swiftly to the right, in an effort to get out of range.

Turning the nose of his ship downward, Fay gave it full power and slipped it into a screaming dive. A screaming dive that brought him down onto the tail of the black ship with incredible speed. Now, at precisely the right instant, Fay opened up with both proton cannons, sending flame-splashed death hurtling after his opponent.

But Black Bart was an old hand at space fighting; a sudden, counter-climb climaxed by a snap-roll brought the black ship out of range of Fay's cannon. But as Fay followed upward, he could see that his blast hadn't been without damage. The rear rocket tube on Black Bart's craft was disabled.

This, however, meant little, for Black Bart's craft suddenly climbed again with amazing grav pull, and a moment later Fay experienced the unpleasant realization that Bart was above him, setting for a dive down on his tail.

"Not good," Kogo squealed sharply. "Black Bart come queek soon, watch it!"

But Fay didn't give his enemy a chance to set for the inevitable dive. He took an immediate, and strategically clever offensive, pointing the nose of his ship upward in a steep climb toward the ebon belly of Black Bart's space fighter. The maneuver caught his adversary napping, and Fay brought the electraguns into play, now, sending a sweeping stream across the belly of the black ship.

But a quick-thinking roll on the part of Black Bart, brought the brigand leader around in position to open up on Fay's craft with both proton cannons on its side mounts.

A shuddering concussion at the rear of his little ship told Fay that his enemy had scored twice, negating two rocket tubes. Smoke was already scorching up to the nose of the little craft, and Kogo, coughing harshly, chattered:

"No good, now. No good. Make same on him!"

The muscles in Fay's jaw were bunched, and he planked his fighter nose-down in a sudden dive to escape the searing heat of Black Bart's guns. Then, rolling sharply over, he climbed again. Sweat was streaking Fay's face, and the smoke sooted over it, clouding his vision.

Black Bart's ship had arced wide, being unable to follow Fay's sharp maneuver, and Fay took advantage of this to start another climb. On the instant he leveled out, Fay, playing but three rocket tubes, fell into a

grav dive that dropped him with sickening swiftness through the void, directly down toward Black Bart.

It was an age-old trick of Fay's, and no one ever dared to wait him out to see if he really intended to crash their space craft. Black Bart was no different. With an orange burst of rocket flame, he high-tailed it downward in an effort to get out from under Fay's falling craft.

Fay threw the rockets full throttle, now, and crept slowly up on the black space fighter with the orange streak on the side. Black Bart was streaking his ship downward in an effort to lose Fay, but suddenly the brigand leader came sharply out of his dive.

Fay was still on his tail. No one had ever shaken the Space Hawk that easily before, and they weren't going to now.

Fay had been looking up over his shoulder, out of the cowling mirrors, at Gorham's ship for a moment, and the sudden sharp turn on the part of Black Bart's ship took him unawares. The black space fighter was now hurtling straight at him, proton guns blasting firey death.

Instantly, Fay's guns answered. And his hand tightened on the controls, almost freezing them, as he held his own hurtling craft on a direct line with the brigand leader's.

"It's you or me, Bart," Fay muttered tensely, and then, with split-second timing, he triggered the electraguns. Black Bart's ship burst into flame a scant hundred yards away, but Fay didn't have to veer off. The pirate craft dropped suddenly downward, a sickening twisted, burning meteor!

THERE were two remaining pirate craft. Gorham bagged one, and Fay cleaned up the other as it tried to make a run for safety. Kogo was counting incessantly, delightedly, from one to eleven.

"That Gorham," he remarked naively to the weary Slade Fay. "He make one damn good space pirate, huh?"

But Fay was too weary and sick inside to smile. He flicked on the voice panel.

"Gorham?" he said. "Naturally you know now where you saw me before."

Gorham's voice came back flatly.

"I think I do, Fay, in fact I'm sure I do."

Fay's voice held no bitterness.

"We could make a run for it," he choked, "but what the hell, it makes no difference now. I'll follow you down on one condition—that you forget about Kogo. He's never done harm. He's about as menacing as a mascot." Then, dully: "This will make it quite a day for you, Inspector."

Gorham's voice came back.

"Quite a day, I agree with you. Don't worry about Kogo, just follow me down." Fay wiped the sweat from his face and nosed his ship in behind Gorham's, marveling at the stern relentless sense of duty that ruled men of the Federation. Kogo kept up an incessant, happily unaware, chatter. . . .

THE citizenry of Planetoid Ninety swarmed in around the occupants of the two space-fighting craft as they emerged from their ships and stepped onto the landing platform. But Dana Forester was the first to reach Fay.

"Slade, Slade," she said huskily. Then, unashamed, she threw her arms about him. "Oh, Slade," she murmured, "I've been such a stupid fool. You've no reason to forgive me for what I thought, but I can at least ask you to do so."

Fay felt a sick nausea assail him. Here was Dana, at last, as he had always hoped she would be—his, beyond a doubt. But now she would never be his.

Through the press of bodies around him, Fay could see Gorham, still utterly, calmly, inscrutable, advancing toward him. Looking down at Dana, Fay fought for words, groped for some way to tell her that this was the final scene for him.

"Fay!" Gorham's voice carried above the others. Then he was before them, looking first at Dana, then at the sooty, sweat-blackened Fay. His eyes were still unreadable, untraced by emotion of any sort.

Fay put one arm around Dana's waist, lips twisting bitterly as he faced the man whose prisoner he was.

"There's no need to tell Dana about this, Gorham. I can do that, if you please."

Gorham's eyes were still fathomless, but the corners of them wrinkled as he spoke.

"Tell her about what, Fay? Tell her that your battle up there was like nothing I've ever seen before, with the possible exception of a fracas staged by a chap who used to be called the Space Hawk?" Then his face creased in a great grin. "Or should I tell her that she's soon going to be the wife of a man who greatly resembles a chap I encountered eight years or so ago?"

Fay was gasping in astonishment, joy, and overwhelming gratitude, fighting a multitude of conflicting emotions. His eyes grew dim and his hand groped for Gorham's.

"This chap you resemble," Gorham was continuing, "was killed eight years ago. He's the same one I spoke of a moment ago. A pirate called the Space Hawk. Good thing he died, eh? Pirates are such unpleasant devils, what?"

"Damn it, Inspector," Fay choked for the words, "you aren't only a great fighter, you're a grand guy!"

Gorham grinned at the bewildered Dana.

"Pay no attention to him, Miss Forester, he's in the habit of mixing things up."

But Slade Fay, after one more grateful glance at Inspector Gorham, turned to Dana and put his arms about her. For the next five minutes he made certain that nothing was mixed up, and that everything was done extremely well.

Which, under the circumstances, was a good thing. For it prevented Fay from hearing the remark made by the round little Martian butterball, Kogo.

"Inspector," said Kogo thumping Gorham on the back and viewing Fay's actions with obvious distaste, "there goes one damn good space pirate, don't you thinking?"

Kogo frowned perplexedly at Gorham's instant roaring laughter, and then turned his sorrowful gaze on Slade Fay—who was still plenty busy. . .

MENTAL TELEPATHY, FAKE OR FACT?

By Guy Faulds

IT wasn't so long ago that the infant field of psychology was looked on by most reputable men of science as being nothing short of sheer quackery. It was only against the sneers and persecution of their fellows that early psychologists were able to advance the field to the point where it was taken from seance rooms to its rightful place in laboratories all over the world.

Once more or less established as fact and not fancy psychology soon went through a stage common to all sciences in their infant stages—that of "fadism" and flagrant exploitation. The 1920's especially were the years in which everyone with fifty dollars to toss away found himself visiting a psychologist or psychoanalyst for the privilege of talking about himself or herself for as long as the cash deposit permitted.

A few of the prominent psychologists of that day were really men of science. But sadly enough, the vast majority of such "mental experts" were outright frauds. For the most part, this sad situation held back the inevitable march of the science until the depression came along, driving out most of the injurious quacks.

It was then that psychology took a new birth, woke up, and began to look around. Much to everyone's surprise, it was found that—while the quackery had been going on—quiet but definite strides had been made by those psychological experts who had remained in their laboratories while their imitators had been grubbing for cash. And chief among the somewhat sensational developments coming to light was a strange new phenomenon called "Mental Telepathy."

It was learned that for a number of years certain scientists had been conducting experiments with surprising—if not conclusive—results.

Through Mental Telepathy, for example, a scientist on an archaeological expedition in the innermost jungles of Peru had transmitted thought messages to a Professor at one of this country's largest Universities in the middle west!

Naturally, the result of this and similar announcements brought a storm of protest, and a great deal of scoffing. "Mysticism," stormed the foremost critics. "Deliberate fraud!" echoed others. But, nevertheless, those having faith in their discovery, stuck to their guns, challenging the critics to punch holes in the carefully constructed case they had already established.

Sir Hubert Wilkens, polar explorer, stepped in on the side of those maintaining the possibility of Mental Telepathy, and went so far as to conduct an experiment with a scientist in New York while he, Wilkens, was at the Pole. The world was astounded when the experiment had some success, but promptly forgot the whole thing within a week after it was disclosed. Obviously, people in general—not to mention many prominent scientists, were as yet unwilling to be convinced of anything so supernatural as this.

Nevertheless, various professors began trying occasional experiments in their classrooms, and found—to their own astonishment as well as that of their students—that there was a strong basis of performance in Mental Telepathy!

If you have never been fortunate anough to take part in an experiment concerning Mental Telepathy, or, as it is scientifically called, "Extra Sensory Perception," you might consider several things before shouting "fake."

How many times, for example, have you found yourself suddenly blurting something which a companion announces simultaneously? Usually both of you laugh and one of you will remark, "two minds with but a single thought," or "great minds run in the same channel."

There are many other such instances in your daily existence to which you might give considerate pause and ask yourself, "coincidence, or something else?" We ask you, could that "something else" be Mental Telepathy?

"Look out, Marsh," roared MacLiesh, "You're going to crash the klieg lights!"

The Strange Adventure of VICTOR MacLIESH

by Alexander Blade

When Grant Marsh plunged his horse into the klieg lights, he caused a strange electrical energy wave that hurled them into a movie set that was more than authentic—it was real!

"EIGHT days behind on our shooting schedule. Eight days which are costing us roundly one thousand dollars per day. Three weeks we've been on this blistering desert to make a picture millions of fans are eagerly awaiting. Eight days behind in less than a month of shooting. How long do you think we can keep this up, *Mister* Grant Marsh? How long do you think I can tolerate the fact that you can't keep your handsome nose out of a whisky bottle?"

Director John Galway's usually bland round features creased into an expression of indignant reproach as he breathlessly concluded his angry pronouncement to the tall, blond, cynically handsome young actor standing before him in the well-furnished tent dressing room.

"Keep your shirt on, John," Grant Marsh said with an irritating smirk. "This picture'll be made on time."

"On time like your last two pictures, Marsh?" a husky voice broke in sarcastically.

John Galway and Grant Marsh both turned to face a tall, huge, giant-shouldered actor who, like Marsh, was dressed in a costume of crusade-era chain mail.

Grant Marsh's handsome mouth twisted in a sneer.

"No one asked for your opinion, MacLiesh," he told the new arrival. "You ought to be out on the set yourself."

Victor MacLiesh, veteran, swashbuckling hero of cinemagoers, glared balefully at the younger and more handsome actor.

"Listen, Marsh," he began, "I've been out there on that blazing set for the last hours. I just came back to your tent here to slap you into sobriety if John couldn't get you ready!"

"It's all right, Victor." Galway broke in hastily. "He seems to have sobered up. It won't do any good to have fighting among the two most important actors in the picture."

"There wouldn't be any fight about it," MacLiesh said contemptuously, his big fists clenching.

But John Galway, realizing that there was a scene to be shot and a picture to be made, headed off the approaching storm.

"Look," he said, "supposing we get out onto the set. It does us no good sitting here in Marsh's tent, while outside five hundred dollars worth of klieg lights are being used up every two hours."

The two actors glared balefully at each other for an instant, then MacLiesh shrugged and moved out of the tent. Grant Marsh, casually lighting a cigarette, followed slowly behind him.

Galway sighed deeply and planked his blue beret atop his round skull.

"If I wasn't bald," he muttered, "I'd

get gray hair!" Then, moving awkwardly in his shiny riding boots, his plump, wide shoulders slouching beneath his multi-colored sports blazer, the little director followed behind his two celluloid sensations. . . .

THREE hours later a merciless California sun beat down searingly on the camera crews, prop men, electricans, and other necessary figures gathered around the shooting set of Epic Pictures' desert location. A great battery of klieg lights had been arranged around the set—for reasons known only to God and Hollywood—and were adding to the perspiration and discomfort of the three figures before the cameras.

Grant Marsh and Victor MacLiesh sat astride huge horses. They were both clad in chain armor, and equipped with heavy swords and lances. Between them, hands on hips, and boots buried deep in the sand, stood an equally perspiring John Galway. His beret was askew, and his sports blazer was draped over his shoulders. His round shiny face wore a look of infinite despair.

"Look," said Manny with desperate patience, "for three hours now we've been trying to shoot this scene right. For three hours I have been telling you, Grant Marsh, that you are supposed to be a knight in the days of the Crusades.

"The name of the picture we are making is 'Crusade Collossal,' remember? You are not a cowboy.

"*You are a knight.* So will you please try to act like a knight? Victor, here, has done his end of this perfect, every time. But you, Grant Marsh, have to junk it up, have to ruin each scene!"

"I don't feel well. I can't seem to give my best today," Grant Marsh answered hotly. "And while we're on the subject, I'll do the acting in this scene. You direct!"

"Hangover for a ham!" MacLiesh said disgustedly. "This is the last picture I'll work with you, brother."

"Please," Galway bleated. "I won't tolerate squabbles. We gotta shoot this scene again."

"Why in the hell don't you bounce this pretty punk out of the picture, John?" MacLiesh said disgustedly. "My Korean valet would do a better job on this scene than Marsh."

"Please!" Galway bleated. Then, turning to the camera crew, Manny said: "All right, fellas, we'll shoot it again. Give us a little more light from the kliegs. Grind when I give the signal." He turned back to his two be-armored principles. "Now don't forget. You, Marsh, are a young knight who rides up to MacLiesh. MacLiesh is King Richard of the Lion Heart. You recognize him immediately, understand?"

"He—" MacLiesh began. But he got no further, for suddenly Grant Marsh's mount reared upward, neighing wildly, and bolted toward the large battery of klieg lights on the side of the set!

"Marsh, MacLiesh, looooookout!" Galway shouted.

"Damn!" MacLiesh thundered.

Galloping madly, Marsh's horse crashed headlong into the huge battery sets. And above the awful din that followed, there came a blinding spluttering explosion from all of the kliegs. It was as if the sun itself, had suddenly burst into orange flame, the very dazzling whiteness of the glare obliterating everything.

Galway, thrown face downward in the sand from the force of the blinding explosion, shook his head wildly against the thundering in his ears. One hand was grabbing for his blue beret, and with the other he was pushing himself up from the ground, blinking unseeingly at the thousands of white dots that flashed before his eyes.

"I'm blinded," he muttered dazedly, his hands groping across his eyes. "Oh, God, I'm blinded!" He could hear moaning from somewhere, moaning and a voice. Strong hands were on his shoulders, and above the moaning the voice was saying, "John, John, are you all right?"

THE white dots ceased wheeling before his eyes, and Galway was able to bring things into focus. The sun was shining, was the first thing he realized. But it wasn't beating down in the relentless fashion it had been minutes before. MacLiesh was standing before him, and it was the huge, armored actor's hands that gripped his shoulders.

"John," MacLiesh repeated, "are you all right?"

The moaning in the background still continued. But Galway didn't answer MacLiesh. His jaw had gone slack, and his button brown eyes were staring uncomprehendingly at the rest of his surroundings. *For he was standing on a mossy*

path in a forest glade!

"Are you all right?" MacLiesh repeated urgently. "Come, man, tell me!"

"Victor," Galway said huskily. "My God, are we dead?" The forest was cool, damp, utterly different from the scorched desert they had stood upon moments before.

MacLiesh's jaw was a solid line of muscle. He shook his head.

"Look over there, John." He pointed to the side of the forest path.

Galway turned in the direction he pointed, and saw the horse on which MacLiesh had been mounted. The huge animal stood quivering above the sprawled bulk of the horse Grant Marsh had been riding. Marsh's mount was twitching spasmodically. The animal's legs were torn and bleeding, and it lay in the center of a tangle of klieg lights, wires, and massive batteries. From beneath Marsh's mount the moaning started again.

"Good God, Galway gasped. "He's pinned underneath!"

MacLiesh had left Galway's side, and was clambering over the maze of tangled battery equipment until he stood above Marsh's mount. Then, quickly, using his great strength to its utmost advantage, MacLiesh was pulling Marsh's limp form out from beneath his sprawling steed. MacLiesh threw his fellow actor's inert body over his shoulder and carried it back to the center of the forest path. Gently he laid Marsh down on the moss.

Galway was beside MacLiesh.

"How, how—" he choked.

MacLiesh shook his head, answering the question Galway had tried to phrase.

"No, Marsh isn't dead. He was knocked out from the shock. His mount is through, though."

Grant Marsh opened his eyes momentarily and groaned, MacLiesh looked down at him.

"No bones broken as far as I can see. Just shock. He'll be okay in a while."

Sighing, Galway returned to the immediate problem of these strange surroundings. He spoke slowly, huskily, as if afraid that he and he alone were seeing something other than a desert location set.

"What—what is it, this place we are, MacLiesh?" Galway gulped. "A different set? Or don't you see what I see?" The tone of his voice indicated that he would be pleased if MacLiesh told him he was crazy.

MacLiesh's jaw was still set. He shook his head.

"I see everything that you see, John. You haven't lost your mind. Something quite a bit worse than screwy has happened. We're a helluva long way from where we were a few minutes ago. Beyond that, I don't know any more than you do."

"But the crew, the cameramen, the extras—" Galway choked desperately.

"Do you see them anywhere around here?" MacLiesh asked with softly significant sarcasm. Galway looked wildly around. Somewhere in the tangled forest a bird twittered mockingly as if in answer to his desperate supplication that sanity return.

MACLIESH, frowning thoughtfully, looked down the silent path of the forest. He put his huge paws on his hips, spreading his feet like an engineer sighting over a tripod.

"This ain't the California desert," Galway moaned despairingly.

"Give the gentleman ten dollars for that deduction," MacLiesh said between his teeth. "No, John, this isn't a desert, and it certainly isn't California. I'm beginning to wonder if it's even the good old U. S. A."

"Ouch!" Galway yelped piteously, his manner suggesting the camel who has just been loaded with the last straw. Then, as if he'd suddenly decided to be magnanimous about the whole thing, he added: "Then where is it?"

MacLiesh took a deep breath, smoothing the chain mail over his massive chest. He flexed his great arms, his manner suggesting he was beginning to enjoy this dilemma.

"You take care of Marsh," he directed. "I'm going to go off the path here and have a look around. Maybe we can get our bearings that way."

And before Galway could protest, MacLiesh's powerful figure was striking off through tangled forest that lined the pathway. In less than a minute, the vegetation had swallowed his armor-clad figure completely. And inside of two minutes more, Galway could no longer hear the sounds of his movements.

Everything was deathly silent, and Galway, white-faced but game, was bending over the stirring form of Grant Marsh.

"Y'all right boy?" he muttered.

"Where in the hell am I?" Grant demanded truculently, sitting up. He put his hands to his aching head.

"I don't even pretend to know—"

Galway began.

"You are in the green glade forests of Sherwood. You are in the realm of Robin Hood!" said a voice directly behind them.

Galway and Grant Marsh turned simultaneously. Turned, to face an array of green-clad, feather-capped stalwarts who had come up unnoticed on them from behind!

"Hey!" Galway screeched in surprise. "This is a climax I didn't order. We have both gone crazy, Marsh, and these peoples must be delegates from an Orson Welles convention!"

A TALL, bearded, broad-shouldered fellow, holding a bow pointed directly at Manny's skull, grinned at this.

"A strange knight," he said over his shoulder to the others. "A strange knight and," he looked at Galway's blue beret and multicolored blazer, "his prize jester!"

"What!" Manny was on his feet, his hands waving wildly, voice strident. "I tell you, I am John Galway, of Epic Pictures. Get back to your own set, all of you. I'll have you fired, I'll—"

"Methinks the jester lacks respect," said the leader of the green clad band. "Jester, you speak to Robin Hood, so watch your tongue, else I split it with a gray goose shaft!"

"Robin Hood!" Galway's was worked up to a fever pitch, now, as all his resentment against his eerie situation poured forth. "A comic, eh? A plagerist, eh? A second Errol Flynn, mebbe?"

"Hold!" thundered Robin Hood. "Save your anger, funny man, and thus save your hide." Then, to the astonished Grant Marsh, who was just now becoming aware of his vastly different surroundings: "What province do you hail from, strange Knight? Be you of the swine, King John's foul band?"

Grant Marsh, Epic Pictures' greatest screen lover, was no match for the situation he now faced. He blew up, completely.

"What in the hell kind of gag do you think this is?"

Robin Hood drew back the gray goose shaft in his strong yew bow.

"You talk as one from the court of King John, the churlish, and with some outer-province accent. By my troth, methinks I'll split your puny chest with this shaft!"

Grant Marsh turned deathly pale. There was one thing which he could believe, and that was the very real, very deadly anger that blazed from the eyes of Robin Hood. He gulped, retreating a step.

"Methinks you show some fright," said Robin Hood. "I do not waste my arrows on cravens such as you. It might be best that we string you from a strong birch until you are hung as high as a hog in market stalls!"

A roar of approval from the green-clad men behind Robin Hood made Marsh's ghastly gray complexion turn green. He turned, trying stumblingly to run, but his unfamiliar chain-mail caught him up, and he fell as Robin Hood's band seized him. Others had grabbed Galway, who struggled furiously but futilely in their grasps.

In less than two minutes, a hempen noose had been fashioned. And in half that time, it was around Grant Marsh's neck, while green men clambered up into the trees to secure the gallows lift.

"I'll have you fired, all of you," Galway shouted again as someone clapped a gag around his mouth. And then, after he was trussed and pushed to the side, Robin Hood's band grouped beneath a tall birch tree to witness the hanging of Epic Pictures' greatest lover.

"Now, strange knight, have you naught to say before you die?" Robin bellowed.

"Let him be, by thunder!"

All eyes turned to the figure which crashed through the tangled forest growth and out onto the pathway. A tall, powerful, mail-clad figure, swinging a great sword.

"Let him be!" Victor MacLiesh bellowed again, and waved his huge sword.

And then, to the utter astonishment of Marsh and Galway, not to mention MacLiesh, the green clad band dropped to their knees as a man!

It was Robin Hood who rose and advanced toward the scowling MacLiesh. Advanced, while MacLiesh shouted to Marsh and Galway:

"Take it easy, laddies, and accept everything you see from now on in. I've done a bit of foraying, and a bit of finding out. This isn't Hollywood, or anything like it. It's England, plenty of centuries back in time!"

Galway moaned under his breath.

"I was beginning to suspect as much." He started another sentiment, vocally, but his gag ended it abruptly. He confined himself to frowning bewilderedly at the

strange panorama before him.

"Release the knight!" MacLiesh bellowed. "Untie the little fellow, too!"

Swiftly, Grant Marsh was untied. Someone cut Galway's bonds and removed the gag from his mouth. Robin Hood was directly before MacLiesh, now, and he dropped to one knee again.

The color was returning to Marsh's cheeks, and the breath to the gasping Galway. Marsh was somewhat less aspen-like now that MacLiesh seemed to have the situation mysteriously in hand.

MacLiesh sheathed his great sword.

"Damn!" he exploded. "If this isn't something to write home about. "His words were directed to Galway and Grant Marsh. Then, of Robin, he demanded: "Well?"

THERE was a dead silence, while John Galway's brown eyes widened incredulously in his cherubic face. He stared unbelievingly from MacLiesh's huge mail-clad form to the row upon row of kneeling outlaws.

It was like a scene from one of his own pictures. The only thing out of place was the look of dazed surprise stamped on MacLiesh's bold rugged features. MacLiesh should, Galway realized subconsciously, be smiling with royal kindliness upon his kneeling subjects instead of acting like he was wondering what was going to happen next.

Grant Marsh nudged Galway in the ribs.

"What's the gag?" he whispered, his face pale and somewhat strained.

Galway mopped his damp brow.

"Who knows?" he shrugged despairingly. "I know we are all crazy but farther than that I cannot go."

MacLiesh rested his big fists on his hips as he stared preplexedly over the ranks of the kneeling men in green.

"Okay boys," he rumbled irritatedly, "on your feet. I'd like to know what's up? Come on! Get up and talk up."

Robin Hood sprang to his feet, his handsome face split in a wide smile.

"Welcome home, Mighty Richard," he said feelingly. "For my men and for myself and for England, we rejoice in your safe return. We pledge to you our strength and loyalty; we pledge you our lives, to be used, if need be, in the liberation of England from the tyrants who have seized her in your absence."

MacLiesh's frown deepened. He stared wonderingly at the tall, well-knit outlaw, clad in bright green cotton jerkin and leather leggings.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Your obedient subject," the outlaw answered. "Men call me Robin Hood. The soldiers of the king call me an outlaw but the poor and weak in the country call me a friend. Whichever name you give me I care not, as long as you but let me fight beside you to regain your kingdom."

"Well I'll be blasted!" MacLiesh boomed.

"So you're Robin Hood, eh? Well by all that's holy I'm glad to run into you." The big movie actor turned to Galway and Marsh, his eyes gleaming with excitement. "D'y'hear that, boys? It's Robin Hood, one of the greatest battlers in history."

"I hear it," Galway said miserably. "I don't like it. Why couldn't we run into some pacifists?"

"Don't worry," MacLiesh said confidently. He strode to Robin Hood, placed his huge hands on the outlaw's shoulders.

"Friends it is, Laddie," he cried "Fighting men like us have got to stick together. I know something about what you've done, Robin Hood and you can consider us part of your band from now on."

ROBIN HOOD dropped to one knee, looked up into MacLiesh's face.

"It is not fitting that you should be a part of my band," he said, "but rather that I should be a humble member of yours. My men and I are yours to command, King Richard. For what nobler destiny could a man aspire to, than the honor of serving Richard of the Lion's Heart?"

Galway groaned.

"Now they have gone crazy too. Calling him King Richard like they meant it. Next we will all be deep sea fishing from saucers."

"Now wait a minute," MacLiesh protested to Robin Hood. "You've got me all wrong. I'm willing to string along with you but not under false colors. I'm not Richard the Lion-Hearted. You've got to get that straightened out. Tell your men that I'm not the king and tell 'm to treat me just like one of the gang."

Robin smiled.

"It shall be as you command. I understand full well the need for secrecy." The smile slipped from his lips as he turned to face his green-clad band. "Men," he cried, "we have been mistaken. Our king is not

with us. Remember that well. Our new member resembles the noble Richard, it is true, but we must forget that. For you know well what would follow if the usurper, King John or his men learned that the rightful king of England was once more in the land."

"For Cripes sake," MacLiesh exploded. "What can I do to convince you I'm not your blasted king? Maybe I look like Richard but as sure as the stars shine at night I'm not. Can't you understand that? I'm not the king. My friends here will tell you who I am."

MacLiesh looked desperately at Galway.

"Tell 'em John. They might believe you."

Galway looked heavenward.

"Don't ask me," he cried helplessly. "I'm not sure myself. I don't want to think about it. My head hurts."

Robin Hood looked at MacLiesh with a puzzled frown.

"I know not what to think," he said bewilderedly. "You *must* be King Richard but you insist you are not. And your speech is strange and different from ours. Please, I beg you, tell me the truth."

"Laddie," MacLiesh spoke decisively, "I'll give it to you straight. I'm not—"

He broke off, listening. From the distance he could hear a thunderous drumming of hooves approaching.

"What's that?" he asked tensely.

"The king's troops," Robin answered swiftly. "They must be on our trail. A price has been set by King John on the head of each of my men. We shall have to flee into the green shelter of the forest."

"By all that's holy," MacLiesh muttered, "I think you're too late." He pointed through the trees. "Look! Do you see what I see? A company of horsemen, about forty I'd say, heading this way full tilt."

"More extras," Galway wailed. "Isn't anybody thinking about the budget?"

"I'm clearing out," Grant Marsh snapped nervously. "Those boys look like they mean business."

MacLiesh grabbed Robin Hood by the arm.

"Have any of your men got horses?"

Robin shook his head.

"We'll fight on foot. It's too late to escape into the forest. We'd be run through like wild dogs before we could travel a dozen rods."

MacLiesh glanced down the wide trail that was formed by an arched avenue of huge trees and saw that the body of horsemen had sighted them, were spurring their horses onward.

"Tell your men to line the sides of this trail," he shouted. "I'll try and stop them, break up their charge. Then you and your boys can pile onto 'em, drag 'em off their mounts."

"You're mad!" Robin replied heatedly. "It is too great a risk. You can't hope to stop them single-handed."

"I can try," MacLiesh growled grimly. Stooping swiftly, he scooped up the long lance that had been part of his equipment for the picture and vaulted to the saddle of his charger. Astride the magnificent animal, MacLiesh wheeled to face the men of Robin Hood.

"Okay, boys," he boomed, "get ready to take 'em. When I mix with the black-hearted skunks, you pile onto 'em. A little team work now is all we need."

HE wheeled his animal to face the charging company of horsemen and brought his hand down on its rump with a resounding smack. The horse got under way as if it had been launched from a catapult. Its hooves drumming the ground like mighty hammers, the huge animal thundered down the path, muscles straining.

MacLiesh crouched his heavy bulk in the saddle, the long formidable lance levelled in front of him, his wide jaw set like a vise.

"Come on, boy," he growled through clenched teeth, "give me some real speed!"

The distance between the MacLiesh and the king's horsemen dwindled swiftly away. The horsemen of the king had given spurs to their mounts and now, as they saw MacLiesh thundering at them, they dropped their own lances into position, presenting a death-studded front to the huge horse and rider.

MacLiesh felt a savage thrill as he felt the huge muscles of the animal beneath him hurtling him onward. His massive fist tightened about the butt of his lance. His free hand gripped the hilt of the long sword strapped to his wrist.

Then it was twenty feet! The next instant MacLiesh felt a terrible jarring shock in his right arm. He saw a swarthy horseman tumbling from his mount, and then he was crashing into the thick of the band of soldiers. He felt lances splintering

against his breast and swords striking against his metal helmet.

But the might and power of his furious charge were not to be stopped by anything less than a stone wall. Horses and men went down before him like tenpins. His lance was useless in close quarters, so he hurled it from him and drew his sword. Like an enraged nemesis, he charged into the thickest group and cut a swath through them with his whistling blade.

The king's men milled uncertainly about, their charge thoroughly disorganized. MacLiesh was enjoying himself hugely, and, it was with a slight feeling of disappointment that he saw Robin Hood's men swarming from trees and bushes and hurling themselves onto the bewildered horsemen.

Some of the king's men were wheeling their steeds and galloping away while others were throwing away their arms in surrender.

MacLiesh, looking anxiously about for more victims, saw three horsemen wheeling to gallop away. With a wild yell he drove his horse into them, knocking two of the men to the ground.

The men crawled to their feet, but before they could draw their swords, MacLiesh knocked them senseless with one terrific blow that almost split their helmets open. He grabbed the bridle of the third horse and jerked the rider about, raising his sword for a finishing blow—but his sword remained poised in mid-air.

For MacLiesh found himself looking into the soft brown eyes of a very terrified but very beautiful young girl.

"I'll be double-damned," he said explosively.

MAC LIESH swung down from his horse and assisted the girl to dismount. The skirmish was over, the soldiers of the king racing away in disorganized retreat. MacLiesh found himself looking again into those deep brown eyes.

"I'm sure getting my fill of shocks this day!" he said in awkward inanity.

"Oh how can I thank you?" the girl breathed gratefully. "These men broke into my home this morning and took me away. They were taking me to the court of King John to be questioned."

MacLiesh was not at his best in feminine company but there was something about this girl that made him wish he was. He was thinking desperately for something clever and possibly flattering to say when he was interrupted by the smooth purring voice of Grant Marsh.

"How do you do," Marsh said smilingly. He was looking not at MacLiesh but at the girl. She smiled back at him, rather uncertainly, and Marsh took that opportunity to move in closer, stepping between MacLiesh and the girl.

MacLiesh's great fists clenched, but before he could open his mouth Robin Hood's laughing voice broke in on him.

"Deny you are a Richard for a hundred years," he laughed, "but you can never make me believe it. There is only one man in the world who could wield a sword and lance as thou hast today. And that man is you, Richard the Lion-Hearted."

The girl turned to MacLiesh at the words. "Is it King Richard that I must thank for my delivery?" she asked, breathlessly surprised.

"Well—not exactly," MacLiesh began.

"None other," Robin Hood interrupted. "Our true king and gracious monarch, Richard of the Lion Heart, is back in England to reclaim his throne."

"I thank thee, good Richard," the girl murmured, "although you do not know me by sight, I am sure you have heard of me. My father is your Uncle Geoffery."

"Uncle?" MacLiesh gasped.

"Yes," the girl answered, "my name is Rowena, eldest daughter of Geoffery of Mont Mart."

MacLiesh had a sinking feeling of injustice and impotent anger.

Everyone believed him to be Richard the Lion-Hearted. That wasn't so bad, but for the fact that this lovely, adorable girl was some kind of a relation to the real Richard.

Grant Marsh was smiling slyly.

"That makes you cousins, doesn't it?" he asked blandly.

"That's right," Rowena said quickly. She added: "First cousins."

MacLiesh glared murderously at Grant Marsh—and then into Rowena's deep brown eyes.

"Isn't that lovely!" he growled.

MAC LIESH would have said more had he not been interrupted at that precise instant by a persistent tug at his sleeve. He turned exasperatedly to find John Galway's anxious face at his elbow.

"I think I've got it," Galway said ex-

citedly. "I think I got the secret of how we were brought here. It's got something to do with the Klieg lights I'm sure of that. I'm goin' to start experimenting with the lights we've got here and see if I can't get us back to our own time."

"That's fine," MacLiesh said unenthusiastically. Looking anxiously about, he saw no sign of Rowena or Grant Marsh. They had slipped away while he was listening to Galway.

"I don't like it here," Galway was saying plaintively. "I want to get back to the twentieth century as soon as possible."

"What's wrong with this century?" MacLiesh asked belligerently. "It's plenty good enough for me. Lot of fine people here."

"Fighting, fighting," Galway groaned, "that's all the people here got on their minds. It makes me sick to my stomach. I tell you I got to get back to my own time or I'll go nuts."

"Well, I'm in no hurry," MacLiesh said. "I'd like to see a little of the country and a little more of the people before I go back. That is, if you *do* figure out some way of getting us back."

"It's those lights," Galway said excitedly. "I know it. I'm going to work on 'em, first thing in the morning. Somehow, someway, the secret is wrapped up in the lights."

Robin Hood joined them then. On the fearless outlaw's face there was hero-worship as he looked at the man he believed to be Richard the Lion-Hearted.

"My men," he said, "have asked me to tell you of their gratitude for your glorious combat in their behalf. They realize, as I do, that, without you, many of us might have fallen into the hands of the usurper, King John."

MacLiesh waved his hand.

"Forget it. Tell me something about this girl, Rowena. Why was she being taken to King John?"

Robin Hood frowned.

"The reason," he said bitterly, "is as cruel as most of John's actions. Her father was one of the knights who contributed to the ransom paid for your release."

"My release?" MacLiesh asked, puzzled.

"Yes," Robin Hood said eagerly. "We knew you were being held prisoner in Germany and we raised a ransom and sent it there three or four months ago. John was so infuriated with this that he ordered the arrest of all those who had contributed to the ransom. He has managed to arrest all but Geoffery of Mont Mart, Rowena's father. His purpose in imprisoning Rowena was to force Geoffery to give himself up rather than allow his daughter to be tortured or killed."

"The dirty swine," MacLiesh ground the words from his rigid jaw.

"His plan would have worked," Robin said, "if it hadn't been for you. Geoffery of Mont Mart will indeed give thanks to thy name when he hears of your heroism in his daughter's account."

This was slight consolation to MacLiesh. He didn't give two whoops what Rowena's father thought. It was Rowena herself he was interested in. He groaned, thinking about it. Why did it happen that the only girl who had ever attracted him had to be separated from him by a phoney relationship?

Suddenly through the still air, MacLiesh heard a shrill, terror-stricken scream. The next instant it was choked off into silence. There was a quick, thunderous roar of hoofbeats that faded rapidly away before MacLiesh could move a muscle.

"Rowena!" The thought, the name seemed to explode in his brain.

"Come on!" he yelled to Robin Hood.

THEY raced in the direction from which the scream had sounded. The sound had seemed to emanate from a grove somewhat to the left of the main path, but when they reached it there was no one there. Robin Hood's eyes dropped to the ground and he pointed to half dozen prints in the dust.

"The king's soldiers," he said swiftly. "A few of them must have circled and come up on the camp from the side. Rowena and the varlet you call Marsh were walking toward this place a few minutes ago."

MacLiesh gazed about desperately. Every second that flitted by gave the mounted soldiers that much more chance to make their escape.

"Get my horse ready," he snapped suddenly. "And then tell me where King John is right at this minute. It's a cinch that they're taking her to him."

Robin Hood started to demur, but after one look at MacLiesh's hard indomitable jaw, decided not to. He hurried off and returned in less than half a minute leading MacLiesh's horse.

"About twenty miles north from here," he said, "is King John's castle. It's de-

fended so that an army would have trouble taking it but you know your own mind, Lion-Hearted. One man will have a better chance at success than a hundred."

MacLiesh climbed into the saddle, trotted past Robin's men to where John Galway was seated on the sward, tinkering with two of the wires leading from the storage battery.

"They've kidnaped Rowena," he said tersely, "and Marsh too, from the looks of it. I'm heading after the skunks. If I don't get back in a few days I won't be coming at all. So if you get the right wires hooked up don't wait for me—just clear out yourself."

Galway looked at him sorrowfully.

"Why couldn't they have just kidnaped Marsh?" he asked, with a sigh. "It would serve them right."

MacLiesh smiled fleetingly as he reined his horse and trotted away. He turned and waved once, then he gave his horse his head and continued onward. . .

THROUGH the stygian blackness of Sherwood forest, MacLiesh trotted steadily that night, and, in the first gray shafts of morning he saw the walls and towers of King John's castle outlined against the sky. It was a huge rambling place, spread over dozens of acres of grounds, consisting of two main structures which served as living quarters and numerous other buildings for the servants and live stock and grain.

The entire cluster of buildings was encircled by a water-filled moat and a high stone wall. A drawbridge crossed the moat at the main gate in the wall and this was the only entrance to the castle.

MacLiesh reined his horse and stared at the castle. Somewhere within those bleak gray walls was Rowena of Mont Mart, the girl whose deep brown eyes had haunted him through the hard ride of the night. With her was Marsh, probably also held prisoner. MacLiesh couldn't forget that if Marsh had not insisted on Rowena taking a walk with him, the king's horsemen would never have captured them.

MacLiesh slipped from his horse and tethered him to a tree well out of sight from the castle. Then he stripped off his chain mail and his gauntlets and hid them in a nearby bush. Finally he unbuckled his great double-edged sword and hid it in the bole of a rotting tree. Dressed then, in ordinary leather jerkin and cotton hose, he struck off on foot for the castle.

Approaching the road that led to the moat, MacLiesh mingled with peasants who were filing into the castle to procure their farming implements for the day's work in the field.

He slumped his head and bent his knees slightly so that his great size would not stand out too conspicuously among the smaller-sized peasants. There were no guards at the drawbridge, he noticed with a relieved sigh, and he passed through the main gate without difficulty.

Inside the courtyard, MacLiesh separated from the peasants and walked swiftly to the base of a tower where a small door was visible. The door, he discovered was locked, but one jar from his shoulder and it swung inward.

With a last swift glance about to be sure that he was not observed, MacLiesh ducked into the small storage room at the base of the tower, easing the door shut after him. It was dark as pitch in the tiny room, but darkness was what MacLiesh wanted. He stretched out his huge frame on the floor and rested his head on the palms of his hands. It would be a long, tiresome wait, he knew, but it must be endured if he hoped to succeed in his wild plan.

THE moon was casting its lambent glow over the courtyard of King John's castle when the door that led to the small storage at the base of the north tower, opened cautiously and a huge, ominous shadow moved along the wall of the castle.

MacLiesh proceeded slowly, inching along, careful lest he betray his position with some sound or quick movement. At last he reached the great gates that led into the castle itself. He drew one gate open slowly and slipped inside. It was, he knew, after midnight and the chance of finding anyone up at this hour was remote.

He moved slowly across the great banquet hall like the shade of a departed guest until he reached a hallway next to a winding staircase. Here he paused, perplexed. The stairway led up and down. After another second's hesitation, he started down the steps. He was looking for the dungeons and they were more than likely located on the basement level.

He descended for several flights and he soon became aware of an unpleasant dampness in the air. Beads of moisture were

gathering on the stone walls and ceiling and every ten or fifteen feet a pool of stagnant green water had collected in the hollowed-out place on the ancient step.

It was dark, dank and dreary; but farther ahead he could see the flickering reflection of some sort of illumination. He increased his caution. If there was a light there might also be a sentry.

The light was streaming at an angle around a curve in the stair well and MacLiesh inched cautiously along until he could peer around the corner of the wall.

Seated on a stool, back against the wall, was an old man. He was nodding fitfully in a semi-slumberous condition. Dangling from his left wrist was an iron ring, to which was attached one long, rusty key.

MacLiesh smiled to himself. Then he stepped forward with the easy grace of a panther and clapped his hand over the old fellow's mouth.

The old man woke with a start and his rheumy eyes popped wide open as they focused on MacLiesh's huge form.

MacLiesh read the mute appeal in the old man's eyes and a swift compassion touched him.

"Don't worry," he said softly. "You're not going to get hurt."

He slipped the iron ring from the old man's arm and dropped it into the pocket of his leather jerkin. Then he looked down indecisively at his prisoner. He couldn't spend the whole night here with his hand over the old man's mouth; and at the same time he had given the old man his promise that he wouldn't harm him. Well—he'd have to break the letter, if not the spirit of that promise.

He lifted his free hand about six inches from the old man's neck and then with a swift chopping stroke, he brought it down sharply at the base of the skull. With a slight sigh, the old man slumped limply against the wall.

MacLiesh eased him down from the chair and stretched him comfortably on the floor before continuing. He rounded the corner, moving more confidently, and proceeded along the corridor until he came to another bend.

Walking swiftly now, he didn't bother to take a precautionary peek around the corner; he merely slowed his pace slightly and stepped around the angle of the corridor—into the arms of two fully armed, but surprised guards.

MAC LIESH recovered first. His right fist flashed upward with the speed of a striking cobra. It collided with the slack jaw of the nearest guard and MacLiesh grunted with satisfaction as the soldier somersaulted backward and crashed to the stone floor in a limp sprawling position.

The second guard sprang away and MacLiesh's second punch whistled ineffectually through the air. Before he could recover his balance, the guard had drawn his sword and was springing at him. MacLiesh took the first slash of the sword on his forearm; he could feel the warm sticky blood oozing from the wound.

The guard plunged after him, seeking to send home a vital thrust. His very eagerness was his disadvantage. He slashed furiously at MacLiesh in a wide, decapitating stroke; but MacLiesh ducked swiftly and the blade whistled over his head and smashed into the stone wall. The blade went flying from the guard's hand. He opened his mouth to scream as MacLiesh sprang at him but he was too late. The big fighter's hands closed over his throat an instant before a sound could be uttered. The guard struggled frantically but the hands at his throat were like claws of steel.

MacLiesh held the grip until the fellow's knees suddenly slackened and gave way, then he stretched him out on the floor. He realized that the sounds of the conflict might have been heard above and that speed was essential now.

He plunged down the corridor, which was dropping to a lower level with every step, until he came to an iron door. It wasn't locked and he shoved his way through and paused in the gloomy darkness of a chamber.

Through the dim gloom he could see row upon row of barred doors lining both sides of several corridors.

MacLiesh heard a sound then, a soft, choked sob. He moved instantly in its direction.

"Rowena," he whispered urgently, "it's me. Mac—I mean Richard. Where are you? Make some kind of noise so I can find you."

Through the darkness, from the far end of the dungeon row there came an ecstatic whisper.

"Here, Richard, here. Oh please hurry."

MacLiesh hurried through the darkness until he located the voice. He fumbled with

his fingers until he found the key hole, then he pulled the key from his pocket and inserted it. With a rusty creak the tumbler fell, the next instant the door squeaked open.

HE put his big arm around the frightened girl's shoulders. Holding her close to him made him feel like an unconquerable giant.

"Stop crying, now," he whispered gently. "I'll have you out of here in a jiffy."

"Marsh is here too," Rowena whispered. "Down in the last cell in the next corridor. Can't we take him too?"

"I suppose we'll have to," MacLiesh growled. "Don't move. I'll get him and we'll get going."

He moved softly down the corridor to Marsh's cell and opened the door.

"On your feet," he muttered. "This is Bastille Day in the thirteenth century."

Grant Marsh appeared in the small doorway, his eyes rolling in terror.

"How did you get here?" he cried hoarsely "You'll be killed, we'll all be killed. We can't escape; the place is too well guarded."

"We can try," MacLiesh said. He grabbed Marsh by the arm and jerked him through the door. "Stop your blubbering now," he snapped, "or we'll have everybody in the place down on our necks."

Marsh stifled his frightened sobs with an effort. MacLiesh moved along carefully until he felt Rowena's hand in the dark.

With one big fist gripping Grant's arm like a vise and the other hand holding Rowena's fingers, MacLiesh eased carefully through the iron door and began the torturous descent to the first floor.

"You're only making it worse," Marsh cried frightenedly. "When they catch us they'll torture us for sure. You were a fool to come here, MacLiesh, a stupid fool."

Rowena was silent, but MacLiesh observed the side-long look of contempt she flashed at Grant Marsh.

"Shut up," MacLiesh told him quietly. "If you keep running at the mouth you'll have more guards here than a beehive has bees."

They proceeded past the two unconscious guards and Marsh choked back a cry of terror as he saw the distended pupils and swollen throat of the one. Past the old man they crept, but before they had gone ten feet past him they heard a sudden commotion at the head of the stairs. Cries, shouts and a pounding of feet. The sounds were coming nearer. Marsh pressed both hands into his mouth to keep from screaming out. MacLiesh glanced about quickly, noticed a small dark alcove at the turn of the steps. Pulling his two charges along, he herded them into the tiny haven. They pressed against the wall hardly daring to breathe.

The footsteps were coming down the steps. Several soldiers marched past their place of concealment. Others followed them. Marsh was trembling with terror.

"I can't stand it," he whispered, "can't stand it."

"Quiet, you fool," MacLiesh hissed.

"I can't stand it!" Marsh suddenly screamed.

He sprang from their place of concealment, dropped to his knees before the soldiers who had wheeled at the sound. One of the soldiers pointed excitedly over Marsh's head, into the alcove.

"There," he shouted excitedly, "there are the others."

"You yellow dog," MacLiesh shouted at Marsh. "You'd sell us down the river to save your own stinking hide."

The soldiers swarmed up the steps now and MacLiesh charged to meet them. His big fists flailed like clubs and every time they struck a man went down. But there were too many men. They leaped at him from behind and forced him to the ground by sheer weight of numbers.

Even then he struggled until something hard and cold smashed against the back of his head. Then a thousand firecrackers exploded in his brain. He had a foggy memory of a feminine voice crying his name, and then he was lying on a rough stone floor and a door clicked shut with metallic finality. The darkness in the cell and the darkness in his head merged.

FOR TWO DAYS MacLiesh was left in his damp and stinking little dungeon in the underpasses of King John's castle. Two days in which the huge actor paced back and forth as restlessly as a caged panther, cursing his inability to remedy his situation. Not once during his hours in the dungeon did MacLiesh give the slightest thought to the world he had known such a short time ago, however.

He thought of Galway, of course, and of the little director's frantic hope that they might in some way be able to get back to

their own time era. MacLiesh felt sorry for Galway, for this was tougher on the rotund little director than it was on Grant Marsh or himself.

At the thought of Marsh, and of his cowardice, MacLiesh's rage grew unbounded. It was obvious that the young actor—thoroughly terrified by the strange predicament he found himself in—was making the best of what to him was a hopeless situation. That, obviously, was the reason why he had been instrumental in revealing them to the guards.

But what was worse to MacLiesh, was the realization that the beautiful brown-eyed Rowena was at this moment in the hands of King John's brutal guardsmen. MacLiesh, at thirty, with ten years as a swashbuckling screen hero behind him, had never fallen prey to feminity before. With all the damsels in Hollywood to choose from, he'd had to wait until he was hurled centuries back in Time to discover what that oldest emotion meant.

And it was when—two days having passed King John's guards came to take him from his cell that MacLiesh's growing fury came to a boiling point.

Hands chained behind him, the mighty-statured MacLiesh was led before a large throne where he saw, for the first time, the despot ruler of England, King John.

John Lackland, usurper of the throne, was a middle-sized, thick-set fellow with what was, to MacLiesh, a particularly unpleasant sneer. He looked down from his great seat, and with a wave of a bejewelled hand, ordered the guards to remove MacLiesh's irons.

When this was done, and MacLiesh stood with sword points menacing him on both sides, King John spoke.

"So this is the knave who would pretend to be my poor brother Richard, eh?"

"Where have you put the girl?" MacLiesh thundered angrily.

The slightly sadistic ruler smiled.

"She will be here shortly, varlet, as will be the craven knight who was caught with you."

"If you've so much as touched her," MacLiesh began.

King John's face went dark.

"Threatening the king?" he bellowed. "Hold your tongue, else I feed it and you to the flames!"

There was a sudden commotion at the great side doors to the hall, and MacLiesh turned to see Grant Marsh and the girl Rowena being led into the room by four guards. One look at the deathly white face of Marsh was enough to show MacLiesh the state of emotion through which the young actor was going. But one look into the clear brown eyes of Rowena told him instantly that the girl's courage still was unshaken. He smiled at her as he caught her eye, and her faint answering smile was enough to give him added strength, greater determination, than before.

THE guards had forced MacLiesh back some ten yards from the throne, and Marsh and Rowena now occupied the spot where he had been standing. King John was smiling evilly down on them, his eyes glittering with the satisfaction of a cat that has just dined on canary, au jus'.

"And you, my dear," purred King John, "are Rowena, daughter of Geoffery of Mont Mart?"

The girl looked at him haughtily, her refusal to answer made plain by the defiance that blazed in her eyes.

"At'sa Lassie," cried MacLiesh, and was promptly edged in closer by sword points for having dared speak.

John Lackland's face grew dark.

"I have issued a proclamation," he snarled, "that your father, Geoffery of Mont Mart present himself as a prisoner to the King's Court within twelve days, if he wishes to have his daughter left unharmed!"

Then, turning to the trembling, ashen-faced Grant Marsh, King John said:

"And you, young knight, can be of service to me. From what I have seen, and what I have been told of you, you would readily give me certain information rather than risk the horror of my torture chambers in the underpasses below. You have already supplied me with the information as to the location of the outlaw Robin Hood's camp, and for that I am grateful. Come around to my side, young knight, and I will allow you to stand with my guards."

MacLiesh gaped at Grant Marsh in utter astonishment. He had known that Marsh was a coward, he had realized that Marsh unwittingly gave them all away when they'd almost succeeded in escape, but this new information concerning almost definite treachery on Marsh's part was more than MacLiesh could stomach.

"You damned skunk!" MacLiesh bellowed, and heedless of the sword points that

hemmed him in, he reached Grant Marsh's side in three gigantic, wrathful strides.

"Damned skunk!" MacLiesh repeated, letting a ripping left hook loose at the point of Marsh's perfectly aquiline nose. There was the satisfying crunch of bone giving way beneath his knuckles, and MacLiesh watched Grant Marsh drop to the floor, face spewing claret.

There was a brief struggle, then, as the guards dragged the infuriated MacLiesh away from the trembling, bleeding Marsh who was rising dazed and shaken to his feet.

"Swine," King John was thundering, "wretched swine! You'll pay for that with pain in my chambers, as well as the death by fire which I had originally planned for you!"

MacLiesh's arms were being twisted behind him by two guards, while a third endeavored to replace the irons on his wrists, and the huge-shouldered swashbuckler was giving them all they could do when, from the far end of the hall, there came a terrific pounding against the huge oak door.

The instant's hesitation on the part of MacLiesh's subduers, an instant's hesitation while they glanced in the direction of the commotion, was all that the burly actor needed to throw them off with a bull-like twist of his back.

MacLiesh grabbed a sword from one of the startled guards and swung lustily once to clear the air around him. Then the doors that had been so furiously pounded, swung open.

The gasp that came from all in the hall made even MacLiesh pause, as he wheeled about. Striding through the open oak doors was a tall, huge-shouldered, superbly muscled giant who—for physical appearances—might have been another Victor MacLiesh!

THE huge-shouldered giant was clad in black chain mail, wearing a black-plumed helmet, and carried an enormous two-handed sword.

"Richard, Richard of the Lion Heart!" The name swept through the Great Hall like a scythe through wheat, and was followed by a sudden, deathly silence.

It was King John who spoke at last, infinite horror and amazement in his voice.

"You! Why, how, what brought you here?"

Richard's voice boomed answer to his treacherous brother, as his eyes riveted on the throne.

"Methinks I might ask you, John, what brought you here, to the throne of England, the title of which is none of yours?"

And MacLiesh was aware now, just as all the others in the hall were, that Richard had entered alone, that there were no knights to follow him or guard him. And looking swiftly at King John, MacLiesh saw from the swift darting of the usurper's dark eyes that he, too, had realized as much. For even now, John shouted to his frozen guards:

"At him, you fools, he is alone!"

But MacLiesh moved and spoke with incredible swiftness. In an instant he was beside the girl, Rowena, clearing a way to her with the sword he had seized. And now he shouted:

"Like hell he's alone. There's at least two of us, so take your chances!"

And in swift strides, MacLiesh swept the girl under one arm and dashed to the side of Richard the Lion-Hearted, his other arm swinging his great blade in a slashing arc that brooked no interference.

"You must be the one Robin spoke of," were Richard's words, as MacLiesh took his place beside him. "Flay wide with your sword, for we've a path to clear to the door. From then on, we've a battle to the drawbridge and the moat!"

"Anything you say, Richard," MacLiesh grunted, slicing down at a guard who had been stupid enough to dash in behind a lance point. "Anything at all!"

And suddenly, as guards pressed in on them from all sides, and the battle took on an exhilarating aspect to MacLiesh, he noticed a sporadic series of white flashes radiating over the windows of the Great Hall.

Something was going on outside the castle.

But then MacLiesh was far too busy with his huge sword, and the life-or-death delicacies of parry and thrust, to be concerned with what was happening elsewhere. Over the heads of the swordsmen hemming Richard, the girl, and himself in, the broad-shouldered MacLiesh could see that John Lackland had left the throne—probably for a more remote and less dangerous spot.

Alternately grunting and gritting his teeth, MacLiesh scythed his sharp, heavy blade this way and that, beating back attack after attack as his little party worked its way toward the still open oak doors at

the front of the hall. Once MacLiesh thought he heard a heavy clanging come from outside the castle in the vicinity of the drawbridge, but then he was forced to center his attention once again on hewing a path through the adversaries blocking his way to the door.

RICHARD was matching and exceeding every stroke of MacLiesh's downing three victims to every two of his comrade in battle. And looking sideward now and then through the sweat and blood that trickled over his eyes, MacLiesh had time to marvel at the masterful swordplay of the giant king. Truly, history hadn't overestimated Richard of the Lion Heart!

As for Rowena, MacLiesh managed to keep between her and the glistening blade thrusts of the Usurper's guards. Once, as he almost slipped face forward in a pool of freshly spilled crimson, MacLiesh offered a silent prayer that the carnage wouldn't sicken the girl to the point of her fainting.

MacLiesh was breathing hard now, and it seemed to him as if the charging forces of John Lacklander's guards would never cease their tireless attack. They were still a good fifteen yards from the door whose refuge they sought, and from the looks of things, weren't any closer to gaining it than they had been at the start. It was all the two embattled warriors—capable though they were—could do to hold their own against the steady, hopelessly outnumbering hordes of the enemy.

But still MacLiesh fought on, inspired to a tremendous degree by the masterful combat of Richard the Lion-Hearted. MacLiesh was scored several times in the thigh, and once in his arm—in addition to the gash that had been opened by a blade which whistled perilously close to his skull.

Then, suddenly, the forces at their rear seemed to melt away. Melt away as a loud shouting grew in volume and green clad men poured into the room. Somehow, Robin Hood's band had gained the drawbridge and entered the castle!

From that moment forward, it was just a question of mopping up the scattered and fleeing members of King John's guard. Robin had put his sword aside now, and was enthusiastically pumping the great paw of Richard.

"We did it," MacLiesh shouted above the turmoil. "Although I don't know how in the blazes Robin and his band were able to take the moat. It should have been an impossible task for them!"

"Methinks you did a lot of the doing," Richard smiled amiably. "Or at least your Jester did."

"Jester?" MacLiesh frowned. Then the light broke on him. "Oh, you mean Galway?" Suddenly he was chortling. "How in the hell did he ever engineer this all-time nick-of-time rescue?"

Richard shook his head in bewildered admiration.

"I know not precisely, but through a powerful knowledge of magic, you may be sure."

"Magic?" MacLiesh frowned. "John Galway was never hot at card tricks. I don't get it?"

Richard put his huge arm around MacLiesh's shoulder.

"Come," he said, "and I'll show you." MacLiesh tightened his arm around Rowena's waist and followed the huge, black-armored king out through the castle to the drawbridge gate. But MacLiesh had no sooner stepped up to the great planked bridge than he realized what Richard meant. For an utterly blinding blaze of light was pouring up at the drawbridge through the darkness on the other side of the moat. And the blinding glare could be caused by one thing, and one thing only—the battery of klieg lights, arranged as an offensive weapon by Galway.

And that voice, shouting up at him from the blinding center of those lights down there, was no one but Galway's.

"Victor, you old son-of-a-gun, you're alive! You have no idea how glad I am to see you, Victor MacLiesh!"

"Come on up here, y'blooming hero!" MacLiesh shouted happily. "Come on up here and explain the magic of your startegy!"

A HALF a minute later, John Galway, still the same but for the lack of his multicolored blazer and the addition of much perspiration, trotted up the drawbridge and into the brilliant pool of light where MacLiesh stood with Rowena and Richard. The little director was almost tearful in his joy at seeing a live and somewhat hale MacLiesh.

"I turned the kliegs on just as soon as

Robin's men lured King John's guards to the edge of the moat. Then, Robin threatened them with black magic if they didn't lower the drawbridge. I'd already explained it to him," Galway said hastily. "But that isn't half as important as what I've got to tell you now, Victor. I have solved our way out of this crazy world back into our own time period!"

MacLiesh nodded vaguely. Richard and Rowena looked just plain dumb and not interested. Galway hurried on, grabbing MacLiesh's leather sleeve determinedly.

"We can go back, Mac, just think of it. I've got it all doped out. It was time travel, Victor. Maybe you never heard anything about it, but that ain't important. We travel in time, back to here, that's what matters. We travelled through an accidental combination of electric generation and light waves, get it?"

"Yeah," said MacLiesh, "I get it roughly. Light waves were electrically generated into intense time waves—set off by the accident Marsh had. So what?"

Rowena looked at Richard.

"Strange talk, this. Is it of magic?" Richard of the Lion Heart looked the least little bit afraid. He gulped and nodded.

Galway went on: "I've got the batteries going at the same heat generation there was before. We make another accident, to the same battery, on the same spot—which I carefully marked—and we can go back. Think of it, Victor, we can go back. It's all set and waiting. Say boodbye to your friends, Victor, and find Grant Marsh. Tell him I've got it all fixed and we're going back to where we belong!"

Galway took an excited step down the drawbridge toward his precious klieg batteries, his hand clutching at MacLiesh's sleeve.

"Come on, quick, I don't know how long I can keep the batteries juiced!"

MacLiesh looked at Richard.

"Tell Rowena, here, for once and for all, that you're Richard, and not I, will you?"

ROWENA turned her beautiful brown eyes on MacLiesh.

"I have been aware of this since John Lackland recognized the real Richard," she said shyly.

Galway broke in desperately.

"Come, Victor, quick, round up Grant Marsh and hurry!"

MacLiesh looked long into Rowena's eyes.

"So I'm not your first cousin after all, is that clear?"

Rowena blushed prettily, and Richard discreetly looked the other way. Galway's face was purple with anxiety, and his eyes showed that he had an unpleasant premonition of what might happen.

The great battery of kliegs seemed to be sputtering imperceptibly, dimming ever so slightly. Galway trotted down the drawbridge, calling over his shoulder.

"Victor, hurry. Hurry! We'll even have to leave Grant Marsh if you don't hurry. Say goodbye to your nice friends, MacLiesh, please!"

"I am glad you are not my first cousin," Rowena said somewhat to the point. "Methinks I was beginning to feel more than a cousinly affection for thee."

"*Was* beginning to?" MacLiesh demanded.

"And still am," Rowena confessed redly. Richard looked once over his shoulder and coughed.

"Get on with it," he said.

From the center of the kliegs, which he was now centering onto a small patch of ground, Galway, shouted: "Victor MacLiesh, there isn't much time!"

"No," MacLiesh murmured, "there isn't," and took Rowena in his arms.

"MacLiesh!" Galway wailed, "it's against your contract!"

"Break it!" MacLiesh looked up and shouted. "I've just signed a new one—to live happily as I've always wanted to with the right gal and no scarcity of constant combat"

"Wisely spoken," said Richard. "I'll need a man of your strength and, er," he looked at the very busy MacLiesh, "er, talents!"

A sudden thunderous pounding of hoofbeats was heard racing along the castle side of the moat, and MacLiesh looked up from his pleasant task long enough to see Grant Marsh—the hysteria of flight in his eyes—cut sharply past him on a charging white steed and clatter madly down the drawbridge.

"Zounds," cried Richard, "yon fugitive's steed is blinded by the lights! Look, the animal dashes madly into the center of the Jester's magical equipment!"

Galway's shout came muffled to Mac-

Liesh's ears.

"Look out, Grant, you fool. Your horse will smash into the batt –"

And that was all of the sentence MacLiesh heard, for it was drowned out in the next split second by a familiar, terrifying explosion as all the klieg lights seemed suddenly to burst into flame. Then, in the darkness and ringing silence that followed moments later, Richard's voice, clearly bewildered, said:

"Incredible magician, your Jester. He and the fugitive have vanished, completely!"

MacLiesh sighed and looked down at Rowena. "I don't envy 'em," he remarked. . .

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER,
May 10th—

". . . John Galway has definitely abandoned plans for the completion of the historical epic he has been shooting on location, one "Crusade Collossal." Various reasons have been advanced for the abandonment of this Epic Pictures' million-banana baby. Chief and most logical reasons are two.

First is the mysterious and totally unexpected retirement and disappearance from screen work of Victor MacLiesh. No one can ascertain what caused this well-loved veteran to walk out in the middle of a picture. Since suit is not being brought against his agent, it is presumed that MacLiesh became badly ill.

The accident to the beautiful beak of second-male-lead, Grant Marsh, might be advanced as the second reason for the fold-up of "Crusade Collossal." Your columnist has definite information that pretty-boy Marsh will not be able to make another picture for ten months—at the end of which time a new nose will have been constructed for him.

But as for John Galway, the plucky little director of the Epic Pictures' opus has advanced an entirely different, and even more baffling, statement concerning the abandonment of his prize picture—his own retirement from cinema!

"Nothing," Galway told your reporter just the other day, "seems authentic to me any more. Maybe some day I'll make another picture, but nothing historical. Definitely nothing historical!"

WHEN THE EARTH GROWS BORED

By Joseph O'Connor

EARTHQUAKES, to those of us who hear of them in terms of death-blazoned headlines and horrifying news reels, are measured only by standards of the havoc and tragedy they generally leave in their wake. To science, however, the persistent tremors of the earth have an entirely different significance. For centuries, the men of science have been engaged in constant study and calculation as to the cause and meaning of these menacing rumblings.

For to the scientists, earth tremors point out the possibility of uncovering unknown facts about the interior of the globe on which we dwell. All their studies and investigations have been directed toward this end. Seismology has been the name most commonly associated with such research.

First among those to bring modern science to the study of earthquakes, was John Winthrop. Sharing in Winthrop's early strides were the scientists, John Milne, who invented the seismograph somewhat comparable to those generally used today, James Alfred Ewing, and Lugi Palmieri. It was through the efforts of these men, and several of the most prominent German scientists of the day, that the measurement of strength and duration of earthquakes was standardized.

Great earthquakes usually begin with slight tremors which rapidly take the form of one or more violent shocks, ending in vibrations which gradually diminish. The causes of earthquakes are varied, most commonly being attributed to jars given the earth's surface when faults occur under its crust. The subterrannean movements of gases and lava in volcanic activity, and the collapse of roofs and caves beneath the crust surface, are other causes for quakes.

Through use of the seismometer, earthquake activity has been placed roughly as occurring in two zones of the earth's surface. The western, northern, and eastern shores of the Pacific, comprise one of these zones, while the Mediterranean, Asia Minor and the East Indies comprise the other zone.

The measurement of earthquake strength and duration in this modern day and age, although vastly simplified by science, has also—due to the nature of our modern pace—been made difficult on occasion. An example of this occurred at Loyola University, in Chicago, some time ago. It seems that the Science Department of that institution obtained one of the finest seismometers in the country and installed it in the dome of their great observatory building. All went well until an "elevated" structure was built within a quarter mile of the University. From that day onward, the seismometer recorded quakes every time trains rumbled past!

Meet the Authors

I WAS born in Vancouver, Washington, twenty-five years ago. It was during my father's campaign for the State Senate that my art talent was first discovered. It was my job to tack up my father's campaign posters and it was my original idea to pencil out my father's foremost front tooth on each card. I was quite proud of the attention the advertisements received through my artistic efforts, but my dad was very unappreciative. He was elected, however, and my wounds have healed nicely.

While we were attending the session in Olympia, I served as a page in the senate chambers, and there I received my first art instruction. Many of the press cartoonists were on hand to cover the session and they were very helpful in advising me on my scrawlings.

I managed to graduate from grammar school with a little politics; my mother was president of the parent-teachers organization. Not being very interested in academics, I had plans to go to sea and be a pirate or something, but my family decided to push me through high school. I only lasted about a week, so I was shipped off to a private school for boys in Seattle. At the Moran school (not to be confused with moron) most of my time was taken by working off demerits, and drawing caricatures of the instructors, which in turn brought me more demerits. I was elected art editor of the school magazine mostly because no one else attending the school could draw. This gave me a chance to see my work in print, and also to decide the magazine editors to discontinue the art editorship.

During the summer vacations I worked on a tugboat herding barges around Puget Sound. Being very much interested in boats I resumed my art, and made many sketches of boats and of my fellow brass-polishers.

I attended two more years at Moran and managed to worm my way through Junior College.

After graduation, I enrolled at the Cornish School of Fine Arts, which was also located in Seattle. I could never understand why they called it a school of fine arts, because most of my instruction was how to draw a beer bottle and throw in fancy shadows and tricky high-lights. I remember also I had a three month problem of drawing a can of peaches. It was during this period of commercial training, that I started to send cartoons to magazines. I was very much surprised to get an acceptance from Collier's on the first try.

Quite elated by my great success I made plans to locate in Chicago and live in a penthouse. Upon my arrival I was surprised to find that a good many other cartoonists had located in Chicago also. I decided to make application at the Chicago Art Institute, and though the Art Institute officials weren't much impressed with my samples of the beer bottle and the can of peaches, I was finally accepted. I studied figure drawing, composition, and design during the day, and continued my cartooning during the evenings.

DICK SHAW

I was quite successful at first, selling to smaller publications, and after two years at the Art Institute, I had begun to sell regularly to The Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, Ziff-Davis publications, and various airplane magazines. I have also been writing ideas for newspaper cartoonists, among them Lichty, Ed Reed, and others. I once had the honor of receiving a fan letter from the late Emelia Earhart. I did a series of cartoons for the Post that had to do with railroading.

In 1939 I married Catherine Dexter, a student at the Art Institute and moved to the country to try farm life. I had planned to combine my drawing with farming, but the duties of a farmer, I find, are too many to allow time to do art work.

Last summer we made a trip to California, and were so impressed that we came back to our farm to gather up our belongings and return. We traded our car for a huge six-wheel truck to carry our things back to California (a la Jode) and we have become so attached to Flexy, as we named the flexible phantom, that we hate to part with it, despite the parking problem.—*Dick Shaw.*

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Science Quiz

The following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you, and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine.

Count 2 points for each correct answer. If your score is better than 60 you're a Quiz Whiz. But if it's less than 60, all we can say is: *Gee Whiz!*

HOT STUFF

Here's where we put the heat on you! But don't get too hot under the collar if you can't fill in the missing spaces on the following facts on heat.

Heat is that particular form of ——— which consists in the kinetic and potential energy of the molecules of matter. The term ——— heat is applied to heat which when supplied to a body produces no change in temperature so as to be appreciated by a thermometer. The relation between the amount of heat added to a body and the consequent rise in temperature is expressed by the ——— heat of the substance, and this is defined as the number of units of heat required to raise the temperature of ——— mass of the substance by ——— ° C.

The unit of heat generally employed in scientific work is the ———, which is the amount of heat required to raise the temperature of one gram of water from ———° C to ———° C. Heat may be transferred from one body to another or from one part to another of the same body in three ways—conduction, ———, ———. In conduction heat is passed from one particle to an adjoining particle at a ——— temperature until the temperatures are uniform. In good conductors the transference takes place ———. In bad conductors, it takes place ———.

In general, the continuous addition of heat to a body causes it to pass from the solid to the ——— state, and then to the ——— (or vaporous) state. Usually, the rate at which a chemical reaction takes place is doubled or tripled by a ——— of temperature amounting to 10° C.

YES OR NO

1. Brazil is larger than the United States of America.
2. It never snows on the equator.
3. A hurricane is more concentrated than a tornado.
4. Gutenberg was the first ever to print with ink.
5. Hercules was the first prize fighter.
6. Howitzers are small cannons.
7. The word manufacture means "to make by hand."
8. Violet is next to red, on the spectrum.
9. There can be rainbows at night.
10. Salt is a mineral.
11. Anarchy means no government at all.
12. An agnostic denies the existence of God.
13. All coast lines are at sea-level.
14. Radio waves are sound waves too faint to hear without a receiver.
15. The magnetic poles are far from the geographical poles.

APPLIED CHEMISTRY MATCH

The following scrambled table gives the chemical names, common names and chief uses. Can you match them?

Chemical Name	*Common Name*	*Uses*
1. Stannous chloride	1. Calomel	1. As a white paint pigment.
2. Magnesium sulphate	2. Red lead	2. In medicine.
3. Magnesium hydroxide	3. Litharge	3. As a germicide (very poisonous).
4. Silver bromide	4. Vermilion	4. As a mordant in dyeing.
5. Mercuric sulphide	5. Epsom Salts	5. In batteries, in refining copper.
6. Magnesium oxide	6. Magnesia	6. A bright-yellow pigment.
7. Mercuric chloride	7. Tin chloride	7. In photography.
8. Mercurous chloride	8. Zinc white	8. As a laxative.
9. Zinc chloride	9. Magnesia	9. A bright-red paint pigment
10. Lead Tetroxide	10. Lunar caustic	10. In making firebricks, crucibles.
11. Zinc oxide	11. Milk of magnesia	11. As a soldering fluid, as a wood preservative.
12. Copper sulphate	12. Chrome yellow	12. As a caustic in medicine. In making indelible ink.
13. Lead chromate	13. Blue vitriol	13. As a laxative.
14 Silver nitrate	14. Corrosive sublimate	14. In making glass, paint and varnish.
15. Lead monoxide	15. Litharge	15. As a paint pigment. *(Answers on page 241)*

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

IT'D BETTER BE BIG!

Sirs:

I hear you are having an anniversary issue. If so, I warn you, it'd better be big! And I do mean gigantic. 15 years is a long time!

E. Roberts,
874 S. 24th St.,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Okay, Mr. Roberts. Is this one big enough for you? Yes, 15 years IS a long time!—Ed.

WHADDYA GONNA DO WITH A GUY LIKE THIS?

Sirs:

Okay. So I'm buying Amazing Stories again. But don't get me wrong. It hasn't improved. I'm back in the fold for only one reason. Namely, to watch Edgar Rice Burroughs take you for a ride. A one way ride.

Even at his worst (witness *The Giant of Mars*), he can outwrite any dozen of your fair-haired boys with one typewriter tied behind him. Ditto, when it comes to covers, J. Allen St. John and your usual cover "artists."

The City of Mummies—This is more like it. Still, a far cry from the Burroughs of twenty-five years ago.

The Man Who Lived Next Week—Amusing. But I've read it before. O'Brien has a formula plot.

Hok and the Gift of Heaven—Good old Hok. What would we do without him and Don Ameche?

Phoney Meteor—Thanks for the explanatory footnote at the end. Incidentally, why doesn't someone advise "Phoney" Beynon to write about England and English people for a change?

March issue as a whole: What difference does it make? I bought it, didn't I?

Now take the February issue (no one else will):

Cover -rave, rave.

The Winking Lights of Mars—Nice, neat, clever. But another mag beat you to the punch. Identical plot and treatment. And beat you to the stands by two weeks.

Adam Link in the Past—What a steal Binder's got here. Hey. Why not an addition to the family? *"Adam and Eve Forge a Link."* Wow. What a yarn that would make. You might call him "Chain." How about it, Mr. Binder, hey?

Battering Rams of Space—When it comes to sadism, lust, sadism, textbook socialism, sadism, mass murder *and* sadism, nobody can top Wilcox in dishing it out. And that's from the heart. With love and kisses.

February issue as a whole: Yipe.

Better gird your girdle and take a quick slug of Sanka. I'm just getting started, brother, you haven't heard anything yet. I sincerely doubt that this letter will get past your juvenile-slanted eye. It's not what you go in for in a big way. No slapsie lushness nor left handed hush-hush. Also, I'm *not* just under fourteen. (Any wise guys with cracks to the contrary are hereby taboo).

A *nice* way for me to act when I'm preparing a cyclone of scripts to batter down your resistance, no? Ah, well, you were a writer once. Yourself.

Ross Rocklynne is the most promising—and delivering—young writer in the science-fiction field. Glad to see a yarn coming up by him. His best story to date *(Quietus*—a minor classic) appeared in another mag. *Big Man* will have to go some to beat it. Or to equal *Nth Man.*

As you no doubt have guessed, I don't like the typical Amazing story. But I see why you go for such slush. And in large quantities. You're gunning for a certain type of pulp reader, the type that dominates the field. If I'm any judge of science fiction, pulp stuff in general and that type of reader, you're doing more than all right by yourself. You probably lead the field in circulation. And that's why you're editor: to rake in the shekels and please a vast bunch of dopes who think they're in on something. You're doing it. Very well, too. So why listen to a long-haired dope like me? Keep on turning out the stuff that brings in the readers. Pleased ones, too. And good luck.

I still don't like your stories.

How about an occasional "idea" story? To break the monotony. Ah, well, just a suggestion.

And here's a temporary farewell to you, and to all the boys and girls who squirm in ecstasies of mad delight every time they see an Amazing Stories, and who don't care or don't give a damn that the best fantasy published today is being written by unknowns like Lord Dunsany, Robert Nathan and Stephen Vincent Benet.

Kenneth L. Harrison
1812 Southeast 48th Ave.,
Portland, Oregon.

Well, Ken, anyway, you like Burroughs, and the

ride he is taking us for. We like it too! Popular? Well, our mail isn't on the slightish side!

Now, about "Winking Lights." How come, we wonder, just as you do, ALL of Binder's yarns appear just too late to be original? Can it be that he is being ESP'd? He once wrote an ESP story, we remember, and a darn good one. But lately, he's been dreaming up the plots for the public domain or something. Better wear a thought shield, Binder! Maybe there IS something to this mental telepathy. More authors lately are finding their inmost thoughts becoming public property.

Whaddya mean, we were a writer, once? Letter for letter, Black World got more fan mail than anything Amazing has published in five years. And that was before we confessed!

If you think we wouldn't LIKE to have Lord Dunsany, Robert Nathan and Stephen Vincent Benet in Amazing Stories, you have no imagination!—Ed.

ADAM LINK'S BODY

Sirs:

I've read your mag, AMAZING, for quite some time and I've been well satisfied with your stories, but there is one thing that has been bothering me. In your newest issue the February '41 you have a story by Eando Binder entitled "ADAM LINK IN THE PAST." Now you having read the story and having records of other ADAM LINK stories can probably answer my question.

No doubt you remember the first "LINK" story in the '39 January issue entitled "I, ROBOT." In this issue it describes ADAM as having a bulky body and rather thin arms and legs. This description is verified by the cover drawing of ADAM himself.

What I want to know is when, where, and how ADAM changed bodies. Because in the newest story he has an amazing new body and I'd like to know where he got it.

Robert A. Nelson,
2044 North 34th St.,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

P.S.

Let PAUL draw your covers.

Adam Link, says Binder several times, is constantly working on his body, improving it. Thus, his body becomes more perfect in each story. Witness the story in this issue. Adam has robots built in a dozen different ways, to build his Utopia City.

About Paul. We have him every month on the back cover, without type destroying its completeness. This is what most of our readers want And to put him on the front cover would detract from our book, simply because variety is the spice that makes anything interesting. Continual sameness would be dull and drab.—Ed.

HERE'S WHY

Sirs:

For months now I have been reading AMAZING STORIES and always wanted to write but never got around to it. Reading the letters in the discussion department I thought it time to voice my opinion, so here it is.

Out of all the science magazines, AMAZING with all its mistakes, (so some readers say) is by far the best I have ever read. And here's why:

Almost all the stories are based on scientific laws and properties—that's swell. Many stories are biological, physical and chemical in nature fit together with some fictional characters and event to make a wow of a science story. Space and stories of other worlds are in the same category, but my one complaint—machine fiction. A mass of metal doing this and producing that. Ugh. Let's stick to the test tube and microscope. Anybody can mentally invent a machine to turn brick into gold, but does it conform to the laws of science? It does not. What say A.S.?

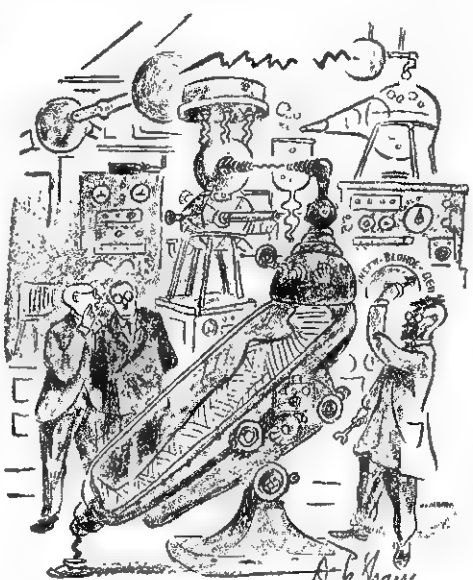
As to serials I say O.K., provided they don't run into more than three installments. The departments are excellent all of them. Front and rear cover paintings are most interesting, but more space and foreign world covers.

Here's some stories I liked best: "Black World," "John Carter of Mars," "West Point 3000 A.D.," "Mystery Moon," "Revolt on the Tenth World," "Treasure Trove in Time," all Adam Link and Hank Cleaver stories and "The Strange Voyage of Dr. Penwing," this is a good "test tube" story.

So there you are. A.S. is swell except for those machine stories, but I know there are a few fans who like this type of story. Please don't print too many. Hey?

George Sorma,
20-21—29 St.,
Astoria, N. Y.

We certainly won't have too many machine



"I hope this blind date turns out better than the redhead he syntheticised last Saturday!"

stories. You can depend on that. And we'll get plenty of test-tube stories too.—Ed

MORE ABOUT "COSMOS"

Sirs:

After reading your little fill-in concerning the book entitled "Cosmos," I couldn't resist writing and asking you if it would be possible for you to publish it. I realize that it is a longer story than any you have ever published, but if you were to print it as a six part serial and perhaps use a slightly smaller type I'm sure that no one would complain. Just think of the advertising your magazine would receive Printing a story written by so many authors. How about it? Do you think that you could manage to print it if enough of us asked for it? I hope so.

Thank goodness Burroughs returned to his old style. After reading that first John Carter story, I was ready to believe that he couldn't write any more, but I take it all back now.

Eureka! I've just discovered that secret of time travel. And no complicated machinery either. All you have to do is go from one time zone to another and you will have traveled an hour in time, either to the future or into the past depending upon the direction you have taken, east or west. Or if that isn't enough, you can travel around the world and travel ahead in time a full twenty-four hours. Simple, isn't it? That's why the rest of you never figured it out. It took a feeble mind to do it.

By the way, Ed Why do you have so many fantastically bright colors on one cover? Does the rainbow have something on you?

Val Vodicka,
2431 First Avenue West,
Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

"Cosmos" couldn't be used, because at least four parts of it have been sold independently by their authors, as complete stories in themselves. A. Merritt, notably. You may have read "Music of the Spheres" some years ago. That was one part.

The colors on our cover? Well, the rainbow is a beautiful thing, isn't it? And it makes you stop and look. That's our idea, exactly. To make you stop and look.—Ed.

LONGER STORIES

Sirs:

Here are a few comments on last year's issues. Your best features were Paul, and most of your covers. The mag as a whole was only fair, quite a few stories that I cared nothing for, and some that were above passable. Bond's "Scientific Pioneer," Rocklynne's "Mathematical Kid," O'Brien's "Suicide Squadrons of Space" and Wilcox's "Voyage That Lasted 600 Years." None of the above could by any stretch of the imagination be called epics, but all were better than average. More stories like the above in the coming year and you will have my vote.

In the main I agree with Mr. Perry's letter in which he makes a plea for the longer story. Offhand I can think of only a few good short stories, and at the same time think of a great many longer ones that were much better. On the whole, it seems that the longer the story, the better, mainly because science fiction, being based on imagination, needs the longer story length in which to build up a concrete picture of the future in the reader's mind. There have been good short stories. Notably Starzl's little gem from the early days of Gernsback Amazing, "Out of the Sub-Universe." But take the better stories that live longest in the reader's mind the Skylarks, Campbell's Arcot, Morey and Wade yarns. Or in the field of the novelette—Weinbaum—stories of the length of your present John Carter yarns. These are much better in the long run at any rate.

This isn't a plea for total abolishment of the short yarn. But it is a very definite plea for longer stories.

Fred Senour,
210 Alameda St.,
Rochester, N. Y.

We have several long stories in this issue. And we have on hand at least 15 long yarns, and several of them are 30,000 words and over. Stanton A. Coblentz has a long novel, like his "Sunken World," awaiting publication.—Ed.

EVERY ISSUE BETTER

Sirs:

I just finished the March issue of AMAZING STORIES and simply had to let you know how much I enjoyed each story. They were all masterpieces of science fiction. It seems to me that every issue of AMAZING is better than the preceding one. A lot of credit is due you for all you have done to increase the popularity of science fiction.

My favorite author during some ten years of reading any and all adventure stories is Edgar Rice Burroughs. Needless to say I am overjoyed to see the schedule for Burroughs in AMAZING and FANTASTIC.

I'm also glad to see the illustrations of J. Allen St. John Speaking of illustrations, how about getting John Coleman Burroughs (Edgar Rice Burroughs' son) to do a cover illustration for you?

N. Nathanson,
1549 St. Nicholas Ave.,
New York, N. Y.

Our readers seem to want St. John on the Burroughs stories. And with the exception of Paul and Morey, all of our art work is locally done. —Ed.

THE CONVENTION

Sirs:

There are several things outstanding in this, my monthly letter to AMAZING. Those two things are 1) the comment on the write up and the pics of the Convention, and 2) two stories in the March issue of Amazing that I must elucidate upon.

In all of the write ups of the Chicon that I have read in the fanzines, the picture of the representative from Decker, Indiana, the one and only person who didn't open his mouth at the Con-

vention, Oscar, holding a copy of AMAZING was supposed to be slick satire upon the much-bereaved magazine. But in the Convention write-up, it gives a boost to AMAZING. Sho nuff tho, the write-up was swell and the personage of ye ed didn't lose a bit of ground by the space given to the pics and story. But this quoted line got me, "Seen there was A. R. Steber, globe-trotting-champion writer of science-fiction." For this part of active fandom, I say thanks for supporting the Chicon. May you do as much for the Denvention.

Another masterpiece has been added to my art collection. The cover by Allen St. John was typically St. John, which is superb! And that is no exaggeration. The only person in science fiction who could paint a cover every issue, and always turn out an excellent piece of artwork is the one and only, the old master, Frank R. Paul. The more I see of his art, the better I like it. A City On Neptune was up to par with the other paintings. So much for the covers, now for the inside illustrations. St John is good on the inside as well as the outside. In fact Allen's illustrations for the Burroughs tale, captured first prize for the inside artwork. Must you use Jay Jackson? Must you use Fuqua? Must you use Morey? Why not just use Krupa and St. John for the inside drawings. Fuqua is a good cover artist, but his style is not easily adapted for inside work. You have the very capable MacCauley to use, use him more.

Now comes the very interesting, sometimes, part of cussing and discussing the stories. I'll just have to declare first place a tie between Phoney Meteor and Manly Wade Wellman's saga of the sword. After I read Hok and the Gift of Heaven, I thought there was no possible chance for another story to be as good as this one. But Mr. Beynon changed my mind—and very definitely. Though I faintly recall a plot the same as Mr. Beynon's, it was handled entirely different and not as well. The little trick of switching and interchanging between two sets of characters may have been the means of success.

The City of Mummies was a fine Burroughs, but Edgar Rice has written many a better tale. The creator of that lovable invader from Mars, Oscar, draws third place with his purely adventure yarn, Lost Colony In the Superstitions. The only reason I can see for this story being in AMAZING is the fact that the writing is excellent.

Gazooks! Another tie for fourth place. The two running neck and neck are Mystery of the Amazing Battery, and Murder in the Past. The Battery tale had an apparent ending but Bern smoothed that difficulty out very nicely. Cabot also introduced a unique twist at the end of his short. However, I detest murder stories in s-f. What's this? An O'Brien story in last place.

Well here's the trouble. For some strange reason this time travel tale seemed entirely implausible to me. The plot was exceptionally weak, but if the story had been graded by its writing, O'Brien would have tied for first. I shall never forget David Wright's combination of skill in the art of writing, humor, and adventure in the little epic, Truth Is a Plague.

Harry Jenkins, Jr.,
2409 Santee Ave.,
Columbia, S. Carolina.

PYRAMIDOLOGISTS

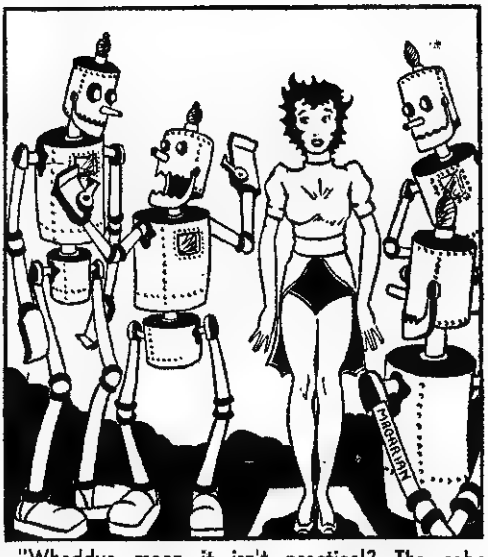
Sirs:

Just a few observations about your mags in general and the December and January issues of Amazing in particular.

The Observatory is fairly interesting. Scientific Mysteries: If I take the dimensions of the room I'm in, look in an astronomical handbook, I would probably find that multiplying the dimensions by 17 skillion would only miss the mean distance from here to Alpha Schmierkasse by 8 dozen miles. These pyramidologists are good at half truths and "approximating."

According to them something big was supposed to happen the 27th of November 1939 but unless it was something very obscure like Willy Zilch picking up a bean-blower instead of a Ford magneto and thus becoming the future Chief of Criminals instead of a nice tame scientist then they were wrong. Your back covers are one of the best things that have ever been put out. I have been getting extra copies, second hand tho, and collecting these planet-life pictures. Along with certain astronomical covers they make a nice decoration for my room. Why don't you try to get Wesso so you can have two *good* artists for your mags.

If Binder needs another plot to keep A. Link going he can have him go back in time and find out that he was Sampson. He could lose his strength by getting a mud pack with an Ampie



"Whaddya mean it isn't practical? The robot public always finds a use for my inventions."

in it. L. Biggs wouldn't mind your stealing one or two from him.

Oh yes I wanted to say that your author biogs are very good.

If the Martians are smart enough to build big canals they would be smart enough to know about hydroponics and therefore would grow their food in greenhouses near the poles thus saving space, time and energy. All they would need would be water in tanks (instead of on the ground where it would evaporate and some be lost), chemicals, and some heating arrangement (they must have energy in a big way to dig "canals" so they could use it in this way instead). Therefore, assuming all this to be true, the "canals" aren't canals but something else. What? The Anti politics or Technocrat in me wants me to say they may be a Martian W.P.A. project. Tell some of the authors, who keep running in and out of your office, about this mess. Then if you print this you can omit this stuff so the readers won't recognize it when it appears in story form, if it does.

That Morey cover was a pip. If he drew like that all the time I might learn to like his stuff. How come tho that he used brown space and yellow stars? Black and white are much better.

A. Ross Kuntz,
2532 Burnside Ave.,
Los Angeles, Calif.

When you stop to consider that there is no black in our covers, you will realize why we don't try very hard for black and white space and stars. There are only three colors in our covers; red, yellow, and blue. Ed

LIT'RY!

Sirs:

Here I've been placidly swallowing formulas for years He's up, he's down, he's up, he's down. Boy! The villain has him by the throat. All is lost! The gal is tied to a metal hitching post and is about to be rendered invisible by a cosmic ray a mile long. The agony!

And then the hero spits on two bare wires, short circuits the current thus saving the girl and burning the villain to a crisp.

I'm used to that. That's the stuff! That's what lulls me to sleep after a hard day at the office. And then what do you do? You unleash a story like PHONEY METEOR on me!

People have told me I'd maybe get a better story in the pulps than I ever would in the slicks. I never believed them. But, so help me, you've done it.

A tale that puts AMAZING in the same category with the lit'ry magazines. T'ch, T'ch

Albert A. Gilmour,
337 Richey Ave.,
West Collingswood, N. J.

A HUNDRED READERS AGREE!

Sirs:

In the March issue of AMAZING STORIES you invite readers to find the flaw in Dr. H. B. Wentz' seeming solution of the age old problem of trisecting an angle. You will no doubt receive many replies, as the matter is quite obvious.

Mathematically there is no flaw. Dr. Wentz' demonstration is perfection itself, once the drawing is admitted. The error lies in the statement of the proposition, and should state that an angle may not be trisected by mechanical means, such as the square and compass, which are in themselves perfect mechanical instruments, subject to error only through imperfect human control.

Where Dr. Wentz' solution breaks down is in his assumption that his points of intersection are located by mechanical means The procedure is theoretically, as well as practically inaccurate, due to the fact that control is exercised by visual means, at three different points simultaneously, an obvious impossibility, and mechanically at no one of them. An error at any one of these three points becomes progressively magnified with each succeeding step, unless visually adjusted. This is, therefore, essentially a method of trial and error, hence not admissible, even though mathematically correct were the drawing mechanically made.

A mechanical device to perform the operations could be constructed without difficulty, but it would lack the necessary theoretical perfection of the square and compass, and no matter with what precision it was made there would still be play in the parts.

Philip M. C. Armstrong,
3424 Burns Ave,
Detroit, Mich

Here's the answer, readers. So, Dr. Wentz hasn't trisected the angle mathematically or geometrically after all.—Ed.

KING ARTHUR? APRIL ISSUE!

Sirs:

I got your latest AMAZING STORIES and thought it was pretty good. I was a little disappointed because you didn't have "King Arthur's Knight in a Yankee Court." John Carter was swell I don't favor the idea of having slick paper either.

AMAZING STORIES takes the lead in all of the S. F. books. I have your Quarterly and read it through twice and liked it both times. The cover on the March issue was all right.

Robert Haseltine,
105 South Main St.,
Elroy, Wis.

MORE CARTOONS THIS TIME!

Sirs:

I am 13 years old and have been reading A. S. since 1938. It is undoubtedly the best in science fiction. My only objections are that the science quiz is too hard and there are not enough cartoons. Paul's back covers are swell. John Carter in The City of Mummies takes first place in the March issue. Phoney Meteor was different and very good. The only objection to your sister mag. *(Fantastic Adventures)* is that it is not monthly.

Toby Kavanaugh,
227 South Ash Ave.,
Lexington, Ky.

WE ARE CORRECTED

Sirs:

In the February issue of AMAZING STORIES you answered the questions as to the heaviest as follows, "Uranium is the heaviest known element." That statement is positively not true. True, Uranium has the greatest atomic weight, but it does not have the greatest density (or Sp. Gravity). Osmium, which is far heavier than Uranium, is the heaviest known element. Platinum is heavier than Uranium, not to mention Tungsten, Rhenium, Gold, and Iridium. I use as proof of these facts two well known books, both of good repute in the scientific world, "Handbook of Chemistry and Physics," by C. D. Hodgman, M. S. Phy., which states, "Osmium is the heaviest known form of matter," and Lange's "Handbook of Chemistry," which says, "Osmium has the greatest density of any known substance."

You also stated that the density of Uranium is the same as that of Lead, 11.337. The density of Uranium is about 18.7 at room temperature, and the At. Wt. is 238.07 not 238.17 (I realize that this could be a typographical error) and At. Wt. of Os is not 190.9, but 190.2; however, between 1909 and 1922, At Wt of Os was thought to be 190.9, and in 1925 the At. Wt. of U was thought to be 238.17.

I am really sorry to have had to make all these corrections, but as you know, a great many people read your magazine, and they must be given accurate information concerning this and other matters. On the whole, however, I find your magazine very interesting and instructive.

Jerome M. Donzis,
Texas.

P. S.: I would appreciate a letter of acknowledgment.

Thanks for the corrections. As to personal replies to letters to Discussions, and to the Correspondence Corner, we must make it a rule never to do so. We get many hundreds of letters each month. We couldn't possibly answer them. Interesting ones, such as yours, are printed, and answered via the column. –Ed.

HE MEANS "GOOD!"

Sirs:

This mag of yours is really getting *good*, and I mean *good!* This back cover series by Paul is really a humdinger. The stories seem to be getting better, too. Keep it up boy, keep it up.

Now for a brickbat. Those inside illustrations for the John Carter stories don't look so hot. The covers by St. John in the March and January issues are pretty good, yes sir. But those inside pics for those Burroughs' stories—ah, me.

All in all, though, the inside illustrations and covers are pretty well done. I especially liked the December front cover by Fuqua. Maybe it's because I like to see a good war-action picture.

Your mag is running away from other SF mags in quality and I might say the same for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. No competition, tch, tch.

Well, so long and keep your high standard up.

Marvin Goldenberg,
1382 Goodfellow,
St. Louis, Mo.

What do you think of Paul's special anniversary cover? He'll be back next issue with another of his cities of other worlds We are amazed at your objection to St John's illustrations. Our readers have applauded them. However, we have asked him to try to merit even your commendation. Let us know if he succeeds, will you?—Ed.

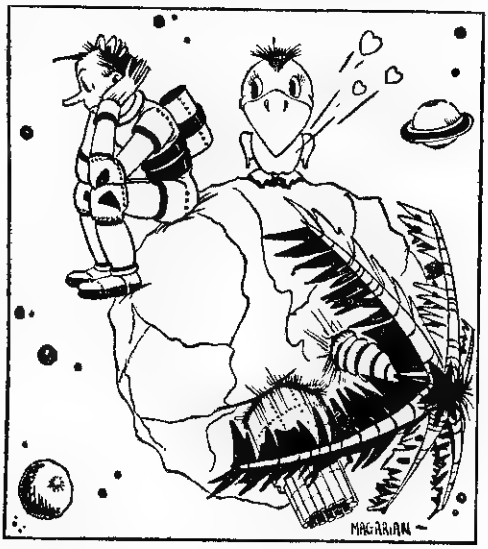
SHE BUYS, READS, AND ENJOYS

Sirs:

Do you know what? I'm practically a moron when it comes to Science, but I buy, read and enjoy AMAZING STORIES every month! I'll bet there are hundreds like me too.

Hundreds who (also like me) have never gotten around to throwing bouquets or brickbats at you. We have to "hear" the rest of the birds' wrangling over what is scientifically possible or impossible. We just go on reading, and what we don't understand, we skip. And do we love those authors whose stories are still enjoyable and understandable after we have skipped the scientific whys and wherefors. Ouch! That brickbat hurt! Now listen, fellows what? Oh, you think me and the rest of the morons should stick to the Oz books? Give up reading AMAZING STORIES? I should say not! Now, listen, you, if you like your science in large doses, why don't you give up AMAZING and get yourself a good text book? Oh, you won't quit reading the mag either? Well, we at least agree on that!

Now, Mr. Editor, do you see the point I'm trying to get over? Even we dopes, as well as the professors, buy, read, enjoy, and agree that we



"Love birds, bah! And they told me Venus was the place that gal without arms came from!"

couldn't get along without AMAZING STORIES!

Mrs. G. E. Sanders,
Oakdale, Calif.

You certainly get your point across. And we're glad we've succeeded in giving you a book which does exactly that. Thanks for the kind words, Mrs. Sanders.—Ed.

YES, FLYING AND POPULAR AVIATION IS GOOD TOO!

Sirs:

Not bad. Not bad at all. Cover is very nice. Four-armed green monster astride an eight-legged "horse." Back cover is up to Paul's high standard.

Feel honored, Editor. Your mag AMAZING is the only SF mag I read now. For a year or so I have been reading the trashy stories of other mags. But I have arrived at the conclusion that AMAZING is the only magazine in the SF field worth reading.

Say, that *Popular Aviation* is a swell mag. How about making AMAZING like PA? That is, large size, slick paper, just like FLYING.

The Man Who Lived Next Week—what a yarn!!! And what names—Mr. P. Piff, Mr. Boodle.

That article and the photos of the Chicon and fans are marvelous. Though Tucker's eyes are a bit shaded. And I can't see how that skeleton could read AMAZING.

Hok is not science fiction.

I am another of those young fans, being 15.

Sorry, pal, but I didn't like Phoney Meteor. I read until I got to the dull part, then stopped because it was depressing. What I like is the type of story that you have often, i.e., the short, humorous yarn with a strange twist.

Harry Schmarje,
318 Stewart Rd.,
Muscatine, Ia.

We're afraid AMAZING isn't quite in FLYING and POPULAR AVIATION'S class. But it would be nice, wouldn't it? And you can dream, can't you?—Ed.

BURROUGHS INSPIRES POETIC MEMORIES!

Sirs:

Got the March issue as usual. The front cover was the best one St. John has done yet.

I think The Man Who Lived Next Week should really go to first place. Hope the Burroughs' fans won't lynch me—just giving my feeble opinion.

I also like City of Mummies and Murder in the Past.

Burroughs' tales remind me of a poem I wrote not so long ago, called "Stranger on Mars." Here it is:

"Walking along in the cold desert air
on the wastes of Mars
Prowling the ruins of cities so fair

DEEP beneath Mars lies the valley Dor, cavern-world of the Black Pirates of Barsoom. And in Dor lies Throxus, the only remaining ocean of a dying world. Nowhere on Mars is adventure keener, nor danger greater. And to the fighting blades of John Carter and Pan Dan Chee, it offered a challenge they had to answer. But perhaps there would not have been a challenge had it not been for the beauty of Llana of Gathol . . . if it had not been for the . . . *Black Prince!*

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The

BLACK PIRATES

of

BARSOOM

JUNE ISSUE

AMAZING STORIES

ON SALE AT YOUR NEWSSTAND APRIL 10th

Under the blazing stars. . . .

"Watching the ruins of a long vanquished race
Crumbling, silent and vast . . .
And the cold desert air is a breeze on my face
Like a memory out of the past. . . ."

I certainly did enjoy the review of the Chicago convention.

Raymond Washington, Jr.,
Live, Oak, Fla.

The editors feel, after reading our mail, that O'Brien's story was liked by others too. And we must give it just due as the best story in the March issue. Burroughs was second. So nobody'll lynch you, we feel sure!—Ed.

NOW YOU'RE TALKING, JACK!

Sirs:

As you may know, I did not like The Giant of Mars. I figured that the other Carter stories would be of the same type and style of The Giant, so I wasn't very anxious to read the March issue. Therefore, I was surprised, in fact, I reeled with delight on finding The City of Mummies such a good story. It was swell, typical Burroughs' stuff. In the familiar Burroughs' style, with the old touches and atmosphere, it leaves nothing to be desired. It had everything that was missing in The Giant. I liked it very much, and if the other stories are only half as good, there'll be no kick from here.

The fact that I did not like it leads me to say that in all fairness to John Carter, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Barsoom, and the readers, I must retract the statement made in my first letter, i.e., "Burroughs has definitely slipped." The City of Mummies proves without a doubt that Mr. Burroughs has definitely *not* slipped, in fact, he is better than ever.

As to that highly critical missive of mine, I'd like to assure you that it was not written for the mere purpose of criticism. I had felt that The Giant was inferior Burroughs work, and that Burroughs fans were being sold an inferior bill of goods; also that a bad story was detrimental to Mr. Burroughs' fine reputation. Now I see that I was much too hasty with my criticism, that I had jumped to conclusions. The current story proves, as you said, that my criticism of Burroughs was unfounded. My apologies to Burroughs and to AMAZING.

Now that the real John Carter is back, and the forthcoming tales promise to be every bit as good as The City of Mummies, we can really look forward to some fine entertainment. The nicest thing in connection with the Carter yarns is the fact that J. Allen St. John is doing the cover and illustrating, a master stroke on the part of AMAZING. The March cover is without a doubt the best I've ever seen on AMAZING, and the inside drawing is fine also.

I hope that St. John is to do a cover for each John Carter story. Why not have an article on St. John, perhaps in Meet the Authors.

I admit that when Burroughs is around I don't pay much attention to the rest of the stories in the magazine, but I do like Manly Wade Well-

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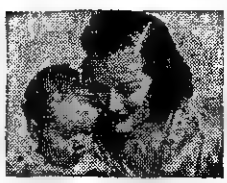
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man's-yarns about Hok and the one this issue has is good. In the February issue I enjoyed Adam Link in the Past, and I don't like the Robot as a rule.

I hope I've squared myself as to Burroughs. I'll catch the Carson of Venus piece in this month's *Fantastic Adventures*, too.

Jack Daley,
616 Gilroy St.,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Your letter just about sums up the situation. We're glad we have pleased you this time. Yes, we'll have St. John's autobiography soon, and his picture. Adam Link is back this month too. Just stick to Burroughs, because the result will be four swell yarns—and Burroughs hints that later on, they'll be a book—full grown!—Ed.

HOW'S THIS FOR SERVICE?

Sirs:

With the March issue, I grade stories: (1) The City of Mummies; (2) The Man Who Lived Next Week; (3) Hok and the Gift of Heaven; (4) Lost Colony in the Superstitions; (5) Mystery of the Amazing Battery; (6) Murder in the Past; (7) Phoney Meteor.

I *demand* sequels to Mystery Moon, Priestess of the Moon, Three Wise Men from Space, Battering Rams of Space (which was a sequel itself), and John Carter and the Giant of Mars.

I agree with you, Ed., if Allen St. John is told to paint brighter covers, he'll wonder what the heck to use.

Use these suggestions in the April issue: (1) futuristic back covers; (2) some of the sequels mentioned; (3) oddities of Science Fiction regularly, occupying a whole page; (4) Science Fiction Quiz for the fans; (5) whole page of science cartoons.

Better stories in the April issue! And so long, you'll hear from me 3 or 4 days after I get my new AS. I haven't got any FA's.

Richard Earnhart,
(9 years old)
4507 Pershing Dr.,
El Paso, Tex.

P. S.—Because of all the suggestions don't think AMAZING STORIES is bad. It isn't. I wanted to make it a little better.

In this issue we give you a futuristic back cover, and many more cartoons, more than a whole page of 'em! Sequels to stories you mention are certainly coming. Also, more oddities. You'll notice many of them as fillers in this issue.—Ed.

NOT A SINGLE BAD STORY!

Sirs:

I can hardly believe it! An issue of AMAZING without a single bad story in it! Looks like your mag is starting to pick up a bit (and I don't mean a little, either). Of course there was one that almost spoiled the issue (isn't there always?): Lost Colony in the Superstitions (gad, what a title!); would have stunk if it hadn't been so well-written.

Speaking of titles, I'm going to seal you up in a steel ball with an impregnable wall of force around it, and toss you into the Atlantic if you

don't do something about them. I'll never forgive you for sticking such a title as Phoney Meteor on John Beynon's super-swell story. Also for that terrible conglomeration of words with which you messed up Donald Bern's short. Say, before I forget it, Mr. Bern: what's wrong with your science? In the first paragraph on Page 125 you say, ". . . a negative stream of electricity draws all the positive elements . . . a positive flow draws the negative electric matter. . . . " Unless my physics teacher was wrong, the positive charges *cannot* be removed from an atom. If the apparatus could have broken matter up into its various electrical components at all, it would have to start by removing the negative charges first, then the positive.

I've got two suggestions to make this time. How about letting a short or novelet be the feature story sometimes? They're often a lot better than the novel. Now if you just follow this next suggestion, you can be sure that I'll buy your magazine as long as I'm able to (I'll do it anyway). All you have to do is leave out the novel and make the Observatory forty pages long. But perhaps that's too much to hope for?

St. John's cover was swell, but Paul fell down. His work this month wasn't as bad as that one he did for the July '40 issue, though. I might also murmur that David Wright O'Brien seems to have improved, and Burroughs' novel was much better than the last one. I wish to thank you for printing the pictures from the convention, as I have always wondered what Ross Rocklynne looked like. I might warn you, however, that you may receive a time-bomb through the mail sometime in the near future. Why? Dr. E. E. Smith's picture was blurred. Grrrr!

Say, I almost forgot! How about getting Eron?

Leonard Marlow,
5809 Beechwood Ave.,
Indianapolis, Ind.

What's the matter with our titles? First, they describe the story (as often as we can make 'em do it—and we sometimes are stumped). Next, Beynon's title was his own! We didn't *change that one. Score for us. Maybe it would have been better if we hadn't weakened and listened to readers who say the things you do in this letter. Now about that science—why couldn't positive electricity be removed? Besides, what* is *the difference, and* which *is "negative"? Is it* really *negative and positive or is it "alpha and omega"? We just call 'em by those names to keep from being confused. And who is "Eron"? Or are we out of touch somehow?—Ed.*

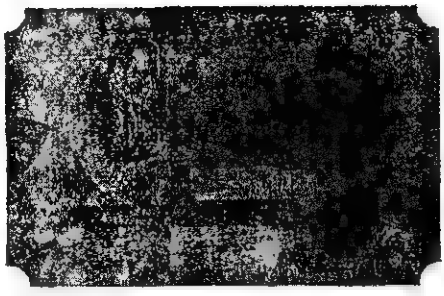
BILL McFARLAND—BEWARE!

Sirs:

Your March issue is so good I feel that I should write and tell you so. Here are my ratings:

(1) The City of Mummies.

(2) Hok and the Gift of Heaven (almost No. 1).



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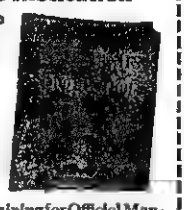

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COMING SOON!
David Innes in another romance of the inner world
PELLUCIDAR
By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

(3) Mystery of the Amazing Battery (more amusing amazing stories, please).
(4) Phoney Meteor.
(5) The Man Who Lived Next Week.
(6) Murder In the Past.
(7) Lost Colony in the Superstitions (Phooey!).

The City of Mummies is the first Burroughs' story I've ever read, but you've acquired another Burroughs' fan!!!!! Is John Carter living in 1940? I don't know how John Carter came to be so in the editors' notes, would you please explain this to me?

I can think of a few nice ways of splitting the throats of certain people whose initials are Bill McFarland, whose letter appeared in this issue. Time stories: senseless dribblings of simple minds indeed! They're the best form of SF.

I missed the January issue. Do you sell back issues? I'd like to get hold of a few copies, if possible.

The cover for The City of Mummies was crumby and you can tell St. John that. Now, if Paul had done it—! There's an artist!!! Put him on inside work. Are all of the AMAZING STORIES covers watercolors, or are some of them in oils?

Richard Salmon,
123 Tifft St.,
Cuyahoga Falls, O.

We'll answer your requests as soon as possible. First, more humor stories are on our desk—and how! Also Burroughs will be with us many more times. John Carter's case history is a long one. He appeared in a half-dozen novels. In reality, he is a native of Virginia, and went to Mars in Civil War days, if our memory serves us right. He still lives, says Burroughs, on Mars, and occasionally comes back to relate his adventures. Yes, we sell back issues. Just address our circulation department. Our covers are in either oil, watercolor, or pastel, depending on the artist. St. John uses both oil and pastel, Fuqua uses watercolor, McCauley uses oil.—Ed.

BURROUGHS—TO AMAZING—AND HE STAYED!

Sirs:

One day last summer I received a letter from Edgar Rice Burroughs (I had been corresponding with him), saying that one of his stories would be published in a magazine called AMAZING STORIES. Well, being an E. R. B. fan I made it a point to get this magazine. I thought I'd buy an issue of AMAZING STORIES first and see what it was like. That issue was the November issue and believe you me, after I finished it I made it a point to get every following issue and I haven't found one story that I don't like.

I'd like to bounce a baseball bat off the noggin of that guy who said that E. R. B. lost his touch when he wrote John Carter and the Giant of Mars. I think it was one of his best.

Here are my ratings on the February issue:
(1) Battering Rams of Space.
(2) Adam Link in the Past.

(3) The Stillwell Degravitator.

(4) The Winking Lights of Mars.

(5) It's a tie between The Accidental Murders and The Last Analysis. As for your covers, they're swell! The inside illustrations are the nuts Paul is a real artist; in fact, he's superb!

There's only one thing I object to in your mag, and that's the Science Quiz. It's too dern hard! But maybe I'm just dumb

I'm not an under-14-reader (I'm just 14), but I'd give my old Willkie button to see this letter printed.

If there are any readers who'd like to correspond with me, I'd be tickled to receive a letter or two.

Dario Milazzo,
921 59th St.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Thanks for your very kind compliments, Mr. Milazzo. We sure are tickled. How about this issue? Is it better than usual? Ed.

HE CAN SEE AGAIN!

Sirs:

You have no idea what AMAZING STORIES means to me. In September 1940, I regained my eyesight. You see, I have been blind for some time. I have been blind for 4 years.

My friends often read to me the stories from various AMAZING STORIES Magazines, and when a person loses his eyesight for even a little while, it puts the mind to work. I could see the various persons, rocketships, and planets, and cities as if I were there.

Now, I have a complaint. Up to now, including the March issue, brought me hours of enjoyment. But why didn't you get the story "City of Mummies," a John Carter story, completed? I didn't like its ending.

Keep up the good work.

Thanking you very much.

George R. Lamper,
4253 N. Mozart St.,
Chicago, Ill.

We can appreciate what AMAZING STORIES *means to you. And we're glad that your sight has returned. John Carter, Pan Dan Chee, and Llana of Gathol will continue their adventures in the second novel of the series—in our June issue. —Ed.*

WELL-MEANING CRITICISM

Sirs:

I should like to write you some well-meaning criticism. I hope you will take it in the spirit it is intended not malicious.

I believe the purpose of your magazine (correct me if I'm wrong) is to cater to people interested in the sciences and who also possess a yen for the unusual and fantastic; to people who are too grown up for fairy tales and prefer to indulge in their escapism, in a manner more befitting scientifically-minded, intelligent adults.

That implies that you are working with a reasonably intelligent public. Then why run 70% of your stories with insipid "love" angles that would be turned down as archaic for a 3rd rate

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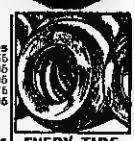

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28x5.25-18	2.45	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.50	1.15
31x5.25-21	2.50	1.15
5.50-17	2.75	1.15
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cowboy movie?

Why do your heroes, scientists, men thousands of years in the future, men from other planets, learned savants, all speak a particularly obnoxious form of obsolete high school slang? This is encountered in about 80% of your stories. Why?! It's as ridiculous as if, for example, a historical novelist quoted Mark Anthony as saying "Nerts to you, Pompey, you can't get my nanny—I'm all wised up on your number." Now—what the hell? That would jolt you right out of 30 B.C. into East Brooklyn, or wherever you have the misfortune to be located.

I imagine that alienates 50% of prospective readers who experimentally pick up your magazine. That sort of thing automatically puts the magazine in a class with *Love Stories, Western Romances, Rover Boys, Superman,* etc. When in reality it has great possibilities.

It could be an intensely interesting collection of unusual scientific information. It could further the pioneer work of Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and such in predicting future scientific achievement in giving absorbing stories based on anthropology, astronomy, chemistry, physics, aviation of the future, following the logical trend of present day science; profusely illustrated, containing unusual photos, printed up in the style of possibly *Coronet,* only a little larger. I'm sure it would create a tremendous sensation among people of foresight and imagination. Nothing like it has ever been done before.

Wouldn't that be something to work for? However, as I have already said in the beginning of my letter, it is merely a thought. You probably know best how to run your business. So excuse me for being a bit of an idealist.—R.M

You certainly are an idealist. But don't you think that all that heavy material without some sugar coating would pall even on the most ideal of idealists after awhile? Certainly your ideas won't work in a pulp. And even in a slick, such as CORONET, where would your market be? Magazines live mostly on DEMAND, not supply. Actually, we are not pioneering, we are entertaining. We can't idealize that any more than it is. After all, the task of entertainment is a great one, and its rewards for success really satisfying, even in an idealistic sort of way.—Ed.

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Earl H. Williams, 1512a State St., East St. Louis, Ill., 30 yrs. of age, would like to receive letters from both sexes, and will reply to all. . . . Leslie McCarthy, 587 21st Ave, Rock Island, Ill., would like to receive the March and June 1940 issues of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. . . . Solomon Kaplan, 3204 Holland Ave., N.Y.C., 19 yrs., would like correspondents of either sex, anywhere, who are interested in stamps, music and art. . . . Kenneth Nahan, Box 305, Westfield, N.J., is interested in hearing from anyone in Canada, South America, Alaska and abroad; he would like to discuss current affairs, philately, writing and science. . . . Chester Hoey, 301 6th Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y., has for sale SCIENTIFIC ENCYCLOPEDIA. . . . Fred Heinichen, 152 W. 62nd St., N.Y.C., would like to hear from young men between 12 and 17 who are interested in joining an organization; this applies to those living in Manhattan and all letters will be answered. . . . Maxine Harrison, 4923 Stimson, Houston, Tex., 17 yrs., would like to hear from anyone near her age outside of Texas. . . . C. G. White, 27 Kineo St., Bangor, Me., 17 yrs., would like to correspond with girls and will answer each letter. . . . Claude Held, 494 Carlton St., Buffalo, N.Y., will quote prices on SF magazines he has for sale; also wants to purchase some. . . . Virginia Scattergood, Route No. 1, Breverton, N.Y., is desirous of pen pals. . . . Jimmy Wood, 2712 Anderson Dr., Raleigh, N.C., 13 yrs., would like to hear from readers and exchange opinions. . . . Harry Schmarje, 318 Stewart Rd., Muscatine, Ia., wishes to dispose of magazines and wants pen pals interested in SF and general correspondence. . . . Dick Waite, Route 1, Banker, N.Y., will trade magazines and reply to all correspondence. . . . Joe Gilbert, 314 34th St., Union City, N.J., has traveled, likes swimming, football, hiking and music; would like correspondents interested in these activities, and will make early replies. . . . John Robertson, 1352 N State St., Jackson, Miss., is desirous of pen pals from Australia and South America; 17 yrs. . . . Jack Clark, 962 North St., Jackson, Miss., would like to sell or trade magazines. . . . E. Evans, 191 Capital Ave., S.W., Battle Creek, Mich., would like to hear from those fans in the southern Michigan area interested in a new club named The Galactic Roamers. . . . Toby Kavanaugh, 227 S. Ashland Ave., Lexington, Ky., has magazines in excellent condition for sale. . . . Harry Docherty, 113-22 216th St., Bellaire, L.I., N.Y., wants to hear from stamp and post card collectors in foreign countries, and post card collectors in the United States, who would care to exchange these items. . . . Fred Claassen, 978 Woodycrest Ave., Bronx, N.Y., has for sale about 50 SF magazines, good condition; write for price list. . . . Robert A. Nelson, 2044 N. 34th St., Milwaukee, Wis., wants pen pals from all over the world. . . .

. . . Jack Murtagh, 509 Selwood Rd., Hastings, H.B., New Zealand, would like to receive issues of AMAZING STORIES. . . . Winifred Marx, New Troy, Michigan, would like to correspond with those between 16 and 19 yrs., particularly interested in phases of amateur photography.

. . . Frank J. Moroff, 981 Home St., Bronx, N. Y., must dispose of his huge collection of SF magazines and rare books. . . . Elmo Bott, 2095 Gilbert St., Beaumont, Texas, would like female correspondents around 16 and 18 yrs. . . . Ivan Funderburg, R.R. 5, Huntington, Ind., has SF magazines for sale; write for details. . . . Bobby Burkhart, 406 N. Cherry St., Florence, Alabama, would like to trade a variety of magazines for SF magazines; write immediately. . . . Robert Wise, 642 Evergreen Ave., Youngstown, Ohio, 18 yrs., wishes a pen pal in Australia, especially interested in stamp collection or foreign languages; also, will A. St. Jaques of Canada please send him your complete address. . . . Jack Hill, 620 Gilmour St., Peterborough, Ont., Can. wants to hear from either sex, 15 or 16 yrs., who are interested in chemistry, photography, Esperanto, sports; all letters will be answered. . . . Alfred E. Maxwell, 545 E. Madison St., Opelousas, La., would like to correspond with any and all avid SF fans. . . . F. W. Fischer, 2313 Laurel Ave., Knoxville, Tenn., has for sale SF items excerpted from sources back to 1910; will sell at reasonable price. . . . Donald A. Dow, 617 Eggert Rd., Buffalo, N. Y., is starting a SF correspondence club, national and international, and wishes to hear from all interested soon as possible. . . . Harry Peterson, Jr., 2221 Carmen Ave., Chicago, Ill., wishes pen pals of both sexes, 16 or 17 yrs. . . . Harry Jenkins, Jr., 2409 Santee Ave., Columbia, S. C., wishes correspondents interested in writing and will reply immediately. . . . Harry Schmarje, 318 Stewart Rd., Muscatine, Ia., wishes to obtain No. 1 AMAZING QUARTERLY. . . . Mrs. Frank B. Lapi, 311—6th St., Union City, N. J., wishes correspondents anywhere. . . .

QUIZ ANSWERS

(Quiz on page 227)

HOT STUFF

Energy, latent, specific, unit, 1, calorie, 15, 16, convection, radiation, lower, rapidly, slowly, liquid, gaseous, rise.

YES OR NO

1. Yes; 2. No; 3. No; 4. No; 5. No; 6. Yes; 7. Yes; 8. No; 9. Yes; 10. Yes; 11. Yes; 12. No; 13. Yes; 14. No; 15. Yes.

APPLIED CHEMISTRY MATCH

1. 1-7-4; 2. 2-5-8; 3. 3-11-13; 4. 4-6-7; 5. 5-4-9; 6. 6-(6 or 9)-10; 7. 7-14-3; 8. 8-1-2; 9. 9-15-11; 10. 10-2-15; 11. 11-8-1; 12. 12-13-5; 13. 13-12-6; 14. 14-10-12; 15. 15-(3 or 15)-14.

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The shades of Sherlock Holmes, Nick Carter, and Perry Mason would have quailed before the mystery that confronted Inspector Carson, the greatest detective of the 25th century. A man could hardly be expected to have a motive for murdering *himself*, unless, of course, he wasn't in his own body! But who *had* been killed, Sturgess or Dole? And how could a little ivory elephant, souvenir of a G. O. P. convention of 500 years ago, help solve the mystery? Don't fail to read this fantastic detective story of the future by

DUNCAN FARNSWORTH

Other stories in the May issue:

Another Invisible Robinhood story by Eando Binder; A fine new fantasy by the masterful Don Wilcox; William P. McGivern's most hilarious story to date; A Rugger Hanley story by David V. Reed; A weird-fantasy by James Norman. Plus many thrilling articles and features.

MAY ISSUE

ON SALE AT YOUR NEWSSTAND MARCH 20TH

NEW YORK INVADED

By Henry Gade

Here is the story of a future war; a war between Mars and Earth. Artist Paul has shown a possible weapon on the back cover

MODERN aviation, and the great success of aerial blitzkrieg warfare, has shown us that in the future, the rocket ship, and the space ship, will play a very important part in the wars of the future. We all hope that there will be no such wars, but judging from past experience, it seems as inevitable as the present war.

Let us try to imagine what a raid from space, say from Mars, would be like. First, let us picture the New York of the year 2000. It is a vast city, with tremendous skyscrapers, and it is Earth's largest city. It is logical to assume that a smashing blow against such a gigantic metropolis as the city of that era will be, would play a great part in determining the outcome of such a future war.

So, let us say that at high noon, we are flying over New York in our sport model racing plane. We have no thought of war in our mind, and all seems peaceful below.

But suddenly, above us, we hear a growing roar, and down from space dart three huge space ships. Space ships are not unusual, because in this world of the year 2000, space travel is an accomplished fact, and space liners ply the void just as airliners cross the oceans today. Therefore, we aren't surprised.

But we are puzzled when the three ships take up position above the city, rather than landing at the space port. They form a ring, and begin to speed about in a huge circle

From each ship a tiny beam breaks out, to meet in the middle. We see that some change is taking place in the atmosphere. By some electrical magic, a gigantic whirlpool, in disc-shape, is being formed out of the air. This disc is heated by electrical discharges, and to our amazement it grows until it becomes, in effect, a giant atmospheric lens, just as capable of concentrating the sunlight as a lens of glass would be.

As the atmospheric lens suddenly begins to send its ray of fiery sunlight down in concentrated fury, we realize the truth. New York is being raided by the Martians. And they are using the most horrible weapon ever devised.

Whole blocks of New York burst into flame, turn black as charcoal under the terrific heat. The city rapidly becomes overhung with a pall of smoke, and we realize that immense destruction is going on. This is terrible. New York is helpless beneath such a weapon.

Now, up from the city's airports come the battle planes of our air force. But they are flying against the most powerful creations of the aviation industry. They are flying against atomic powered space ships.

Like deadly lances, the electrical rays leap out, catching our fighting planes, and explode their gasoline tanks. Down they go, flaming funeral pyres for the men in them.

What can we do?

But, as we hover in helpless horror, our own space-fighting craft arrive, speedy ships armed with powerful atomic cannons. But strangely, they do not attack the heavier armed battleships of space, with their deadly rays. Instead, as we wonder what is happening, they dart higher, up above the deadly lens, and from their bellies they loose a cloud of smoke. Back and forth they weave, forming a cloud blanket that cuts off the source of the great atmospheric lens' potency, the ordinary noon-day sunlight.

Here we have the Martians at a disadvantage. Due to their circular formation, and the necessity of maintaining it, they cannot move swiftly in a horizontal direction. They have one recourse, and that is to break formation, and dart away.

But now, like deadly hawks, the Earth ships dart down through the smoke screen, dive-bombing as no modern bomber could, and firing streams of atomic shells.

Down go the Martian ships, blasted to bits. But the war has begun. Mars has lost three battleships. Earth has had its greatest city devastated. Where will it all end? War grows constantly more horrible. What will the next attack be? Only the future, and the science of aviation can tell.

(For the purposes of illustration, artist Paul has shown the sunlight beam on the back cover above as well as below the atmospheric lens. Actually, there would be no beam visible above it, and it would not be visible directly below the lens, but would become brighter as it concentrated, until at the ground, it would be hot enough to melt steel instantly.—Ed.)

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MARTIAN SPACESHIPS INVADE NEW YORK

Aviation today points the way toward other planets. Will it someday be the deciding factor in a great war between worlds? Artist Paul depicts here a Martian raider using a terrible weapon of concentrated sunlight. (See page 242 for complete details)